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Editorial

Ever since it acquired its present form in 1971, *Screen* has devoted a lot of space to the issue of realism and to a questioning of the various forms of realist representation to be found both in dominant 'Hollywood' cinema and in other practices that are in varying degrees and on various levels oppositional. The diversity of practices and the diversity of meanings that the term realism itself can possess demand the taking up of a position which is critical of the claims embodied in realist ideologies, rather than hostile to realism as such. Our questioning of, say, the work of Loach and Garnett, is based on a critique of certain models of realism, and the claims made for them, rather than on any belief in the intrinsic virtues of 'modernist' and anti-realist strategies and devices. Conversely, our support for certain modernist practices, such as those evidenced in the work of Straub/Huillet, is not on the grounds of their supposed anti-realism, far from it. On the contrary there is more realism, in a certain sense of the word, in the work of Straub/Huillet, and in much avant-garde work, than there is in regular Hollywood practice, or in that of Loach and Garnett. Furthermore, the presence or absence of these different realisms is not in itself a sufficient reason for being for or against the works in which the realism in question is embodied. If differing artistic practices are to be evaluated and seen in relation to each other, then the question of realism – and of different realisms – requires to be elucidated, and this is what we have aimed to do.

On one level, however, we have consistently opposed realism, and that is the philosophical level. The discourse of realism is not just a matter of aesthetics, but also of epistemology. Support for a realist work, or the support or denigration of a work on the grounds of its realism, implies a belief that realism is possible, and this in turn relies, implicitly, on a philosophical position towards reality and the knowledge that can be had of it. If there is one thing that all approaches to the problem of realism in *Screen* over the past six years have had in common, it is a conviction that the philosophies – or ideologies – of realism are themselves highly suspect, far more so than the practices which they underpin.

- 6 What characterises realist philosophies is not so much the belief that there is a real which can be known as its converse – that there is knowledge which is knowledge of the real and that this knowledge can be transparent in language and in representational forms. It is significant that the three discourses which *Screen* has most consistently used in its inquiry into the epistemology of representation – historical materialism, semiotics and psychoanalysis – can each be interpreted in both realist and anti-realist directions. That is, they can either be used as means of access to knowledge of the real (disguised by ‘phenomenal forms’, by ‘the arbitrariness of the sign’ or by the ‘misrecognition of the ego’ as the case may be) or as practices for determining the structure and processes of knowledge. It is in the second sense that we have tried to use them.

In this issue, Rosalind Coward’s article carries on, and makes more explicit, the epistemological critique of realism which has underlain the magazine’s work in the past. The article is also polemically addressed both to *Screen*, for failing to develop adequately certain implications of its work on representation in relation to social and class questions, and to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. Ever since its foundation the Centre has been in the forefront of attempts to rescue the concept of class from sociology and that of culture from the high-art tradition. In recent years this combination of concerns has involved an active engagement with various currents of Marxism and the development of a distinctive position on ideology and culture. While paying tribute to the unique work that the Centre has produced – a tribute that it is worth reiterating here – the article takes fundamental issue with it on an epistemological level, arguing that its theory of culture as an expression of class and class interest fails to recognise, in fully Marxist terms, the complexity of the way ‘cultural’ representations are produced and the determining action of the means of representation (with its attendant possibilities of subject position) on the represented. Principally what is involved here is the concept of ideology, which is at the core of *Screen*’s current concerns and also, though in a different way, those of the Centre. We hope that the clarification of differences in epistemological position will lead to a productive interchange of ideas in this important area.

The SEFT/*Screen* weekend school on Realism in October 1976 has already provided the material of two articles in the magazine, those by Colin MacCabe in v 17 n 3 and by Stephen Heath in v 17 n 4. We now publish a third contribution, the text of a lecture given by Raymond Williams in which he discusses the Allen/Loach/Garnett television film *The Big Flame* in relation to traditions of realist representation that had grown up in the literature and drama of the 18th and 19th centuries. As he shows, realism as it developed was never an absolute, nor can it be reduced to a

formula for reproduction of the real. On the contrary, it was always part of a historically defined project, which very often had a specific political component. The politics of realism, however, have always been connected with bourgeois representation in a strict sense and this form of representation runs into serious problems the moment it takes a non-bourgeois world as its object or poses itself as a possible mode of expression of a proletarian standpoint. These problems have been confronted in the drama by Brecht, and to some extent by Eisenstein and Vertov in the cinema.

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Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* is a film which has been largely dismissed by the realist and documentarist tradition but has on the contrary been enthusiastically adopted by sections of the recent formalist avant-garde. In their analysis of the film Stephen Crofts and Olivia Rose argue that neither approach is tenable and that the film is in fact founded on a dialectical movement of analysis and synthesis in which the film's rhetorical figures and devices are not used independently of the content but in order to construct it in a new way, in line with Vertov's political critique of the contemporary social formation in the Soviet Union.

The remaining material in the issue must largely be allowed to speak for itself. Jonathan Curling and Fran McLean's report on the IFA Conference and the issues raised there demonstrates the complexity of the problems facing independent film-makers in the present conjuncture — a complexity which was perhaps not adequately recognised in John Ellis' article on the BFI Production Board in the last number of *Screen*. We also print two letters from film-makers which take issue with positions that the authors believe to have been implicit in the article, together with a reply from John Ellis.

Finally, on behalf of the Editorial Board, I should like to express our thanks to Ben Brewster, who was editor of *Screen* from 1974 to the end of 1976 but has now left to take up a lectureship at the University of Kent, and to Elizabeth Cowie, who was editorial and administrative officer for SEFT for four years, working on both *Screen* and *Screen Education*, and who left her post with the Society in the autumn to take up full-time graduate work at the Slade Film Unit. Both Elizabeth and Ben, however, remain with the magazine as members of the Editorial Board, where their skills, experience and knowledge continue to be appreciated.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

The next *Screen* readers' meeting, to discuss the contents of this number of the magazine with contributors and members of the Editorial Board, will take place on Saturday, June 4 at 11.00 am in the SEFT offices at 29 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PL.

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An Essay Towards *Man with a Movie Camera**

Stephen Crofts and Olivia Rose

I Introduction

Vertov's career, writings and achievements have already been described in *Screen* by Masha Enzensberger.¹ We shall begin here with a brief reading of Vertov's 1920's writings as constituting proposals for a materialist theory of film. His initial premise, echoed later by Godard-Gorin in *Vent d'Est*, is that the film camera was appropriated by the bourgeoisie for its own ideological purposes:

'The camera was adjusted so as to penetrate more deeply into the visible world, to explore and record visual facts, to prevent forgetting what is happening and what it is therefore necessary to bear in mind. But the camera has had no luck. It was invented when there existed no country where capital did not reign. The bourgeoisie had the diabolical idea of using this new toy to entertain the working masses or, more accurately, to distract workers' attention from their fundamental objective, the struggle against their masters.'²

Such cinema took the form of 'acted cinema', the costumed fictional film which dominated Soviet screens and against which Vertov waged a life-long battle, describing it variously as the new

* This article originates from postgraduate work by Stephen Crofts at the Royal College of Art. The authors would like to acknowledge the considerable material help received from Jeremy Bolton and the staff of the National Film Archive and from Nicky North and Erich Sargent of the Educational Advisory Service of the BFI. They would also like to thank Nik Rose for his advice, and Masha Enzensberger for invaluable assistance with translations from the film and information on Soviet culture.

- 10 'opium of the people', as working like a 'mawkish spider's web', like drunkenness, religion or hypnosis 'to stuff such and such ideas, such and such conceptions into the subconscious'.³ Well aware of the precarious political base of proletarian rule in Soviet Russia – 'Our revolution has not yet [1926] had the time or the chance to sweep out . . . the terrible heritage left us by the bourgeois regime'⁴ – Vertov promotes the vital importance of ideological struggle in and through cinema. Hence the terms of his virulent assault on all 'acted cinema' and particularly on such 'cine-Mensheviks' as Eisenstein, whose *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin* he denounced as 'acted films in documentary trousers'.⁵ And hence his campaign for a 'Leninist film proportion' whereby cinema programming priorities would be reversed so that 45 per cent of the programmes would be documentary 'montages of actualities'.⁶ The basic aim here, as outlined in 1924, was 'to see and to show the world in the name of the world proletarian revolution'.⁷

Under the banner of Kino-Eye – which placed crucial emphasis on the '*dislocation and concentration of visual phenomena*' through montage – this programme aimed 'to place at the centre of attention the economic structure of society', 'to open the working masses' eyes to the links (neither of the love story nor the detective story) uniting visual phenomena'; 'to expose to workers the bourgeois structure of the world', 'to show the worker that it is he/she who manufactures everything and that therefore everything belongs to him/her'.⁸ The Kino-Eye therefore disputes the human eye's visual representation of the world and thus engages in a struggle against the ideology of the visible, against the mystification that visual phenomena *per se* reveal the truth of the world. Of the work of all Soviet 1920s montage theorist-practitioners, Vertov's Kino-Eye 'montage of actualities' most radically develops the anti-realist and anti-psychological potential of montage. And this in the direct service of ideological struggle for the proletariat. Vertov's theory was often elaborated in terms of specific cultural intervention: theory as polemic.⁹ In 1929, the year of Eisenstein's major montage typologies,¹⁰ Vertov notes the danger of publishing such a typology, because of the 'absurdities' arising from its misapplication.¹¹ *Man with a Movie Camera*, released in the same year, is in a sense Vertov's alternative: it is less easily misapplied, and if it offers any model for subsequent films, those films must be as carefully located within their own historical conjuncture and be structured accordingly.

This article proposes a Marxist analysis of a film on the one hand variously written off as incomprehensible, as a meaningless compendium of trick effects or indeed as 'camera hooliganism' in Eisenstein's phrase,¹² or alternatively co-opted as sire of *cinéma-vérité* or of the American avant-garde. The inadequacy of such

purely empirical misreadings and non-readings – to be outlined in Part IV – stresses the need for a Marxist theoretical framework in analysing *Man with a Movie Camera* in particular and, indeed, any film. For only that theoretical appraisal is capable of understanding the ideological basis of cinema through its relationship to the mode of production as located within social formations. This enables theoretical explanation of a film's ideological operations as well as of the ideological determinants of its material conditions of existence. No other framework adequately explains the subjects with which all films – with varying degrees of awareness on the parts of those who produce them – necessarily engage: the ideological determinations of social relations and of cinematic forms, the dialectics of film as a process of construction and historical materialism with its relevance for the class division of social formations. The explicitness of Vertov's engagement with these subjects in his materialist theory of film underlines the signal relevance of a Marxist conceptual apparatus for the analysis of *Man with a Movie Camera*.

A starting point for this analysis can be found in the section on The Method of Political Economy in Marx's 1857 'Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy'. This text has been chosen not only for its intrinsic interest but because of its remarkable correspondence with positions assumed by Vertov both in his theoretical writings and (as we shall see) in his film-making practice.

In this text Marx counterposes his own theory and method to that of previous economists. His crucial distinction is between theorisation of a problem – itself a practice of production, a process of transformation – and explanations which fail to provide a foundation for their own abstractions. Marx's method proposes a double movement from concrete to abstract and back into the concrete. In this way, it advances beyond considering its object as a given aggregate or abstract. Instead of merely reflecting phenomenal reality, it deconstructs that reality and reconstructs it through its own conceptualisation. It allows, in other words, for the process of transformation. The explanations of classical economists, on the other hand, are rooted in abstractions having little substantive correspondence with any reality. Such abstractions are meaningless because they deny any understanding of the process by which they themselves have acquired meaning in the first instance. They proceed from an evolutionary model of history and are reified unless located within dialectical and historical materialism: 'Even the most abstract categories . . . are . . . themselves . . . the product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within those relations.'¹³ Marx counterposes to this static model the conception of a complex unity founded in the material forces of history: 'The concrete is concrete because it is a concentration of many determinations, hence a unity of the diverse.'¹⁴ Whereas in untheorised, ideological thinking, this com-

- 12 plexity evaporates to leave only a set of abstract determinations which *appears* to constitute its essence, Marx's postulate proceeds through abstract determinations to reproduce the concrete by way of thought conceptualising the way the object can be thought: 'The method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproducing it as the concrete in the mind.'¹⁵

Thus for *Man with a Movie Camera* this necessitates the exposition and grounding of the film's problematics within the instability and uncertainty of the reigning political economy. (Agriculture will not be considered here because of the film's concentration on the urban rather than the rural.) Adopted by Lenin in 1921 following the ravages of World War, Civil War, blockades and famine, the Soviet Union's NEP (New Economic Policy) was a necessary compromise. The pressing needs for industrial and technological expansion and for full employment and education programmes accentuated the need for State-owned capital. While the State retained control of most heavy industry, it also endorsed projects designed to attract foreign investment capital – unsuccessfully – and internally placed major responsibility for increased production and trade in the hands of private enterprise. Such enterprises easily found ways around the registration etc requirements designed to control them. If they did help consolidate the economy, they soon also expanded into a considerable private sector commanding some 42.5 per cent of internal trade at its peak in 1924-25,¹⁶ at a time when such entrepreneurial concerns should have been eradicated. Private enterprise sought to maximise profit and personal wealth. In turn a consumer market was created which could absorb – indeed demanded – inessential, luxury commodities. This vicious circle of capital fast spawned a new bourgeoisie of NEP people. In the late 1920's, a new bureaucracy with its meritocratic career structure equally contributed to the newly competitive consumer market. The proportion of internal consumer trade in private hands declined during the second half of the 1920's, particularly as a result of increasingly stringent measures against it from 1927 on, 1928-9 marking its last fling. However, the differentials arising from the development of separate labouring and consuming sectors had already been instituted. From 1926 on, plans were being laid for the first Five-Year Plan (1929-34) which effectively, though not officially, displaced NEP and which further complicated the economic situation. There was a fundamental contradiction between the Plan's stated aims – to ensure collectivisation, full employment and a more egalitarian society – and the needs of the capital-intensive industrial programme it sought to implement. The resultant high rate of unemployment was just one of the politically undesirable consequences of this programme.

Confusions and hardships arising from this economic situation were compounded – indeed, complemented – by an increasing poli-

tical repression of which the 1928 Shakhty trial and the banishment of Trotsky were symptomatic. The same repression was also responsible for the censorship of information on this period of Soviet history. This facilitated the glossing over of discrepancies between Party line and political practice, and is, for instance, one reason why Carr chose to stop his monumental *History of Soviet Russia* at 1929. By 1931 the political climate was such that open discussion of dialectical materialism was officially banned. Clearly enough, in such a situation, few could count on the security or permanence of the bases on which their daily lives rested:

There was a concomitant hardening in cultural policy. In literature – debates about which gave the lead for debates about other artistic practices – indirect political pressures led to the hegemony of RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) with its promotion of a proletarian realism and to the demise of *Novy Lef*, organ of the politicised Futurists. In film journals open discussion of aesthetic issues disappeared as from 1927. The first-ever All-Union Party Congress on Film Matters, held in 1928, marked a similar narrowing of outlook, charges of ‘formalism’, for instance, being invoked against Vertov for *The Eleventh Year* and against Eisenstein for *October*. In 1928 too, Narkompros (Commissariat of Education) for the first time intervened to review the year’s production schedule and banned 36 per cent of previously authorised scenarios. The film industry had been moving towards centralisation since the establishment of Sovkino’s effective hegemony in 1925. It was fully centralised into Soyuzkino in 1930 under the industrial administrator, Shumyatsky. Censorship denies us access to many of Vertov’s writings of the period. The 1966 Moscow edition of these describes many of his public statements and articles, few of which were published until this edition, as being ‘abridged’, while his diaries contain not a single entry for the years 1928–32 inclusive except for an account of a week abroad.¹⁷ Similarly, Dovzhenko’s notebooks, published at the same time, begin only in 1941,¹⁸ while Eisenstein’s ‘Notes for a Film of Capital’ emerged only in 1973.¹⁹

If montage cinema peaked in the late 1920’s with such films as *Man with a Movie Camera*, *October*, *Zvenigora* and *The New Babylon*, this was against the context of official harassment outlined above. In 1965 Kozintsev himself aptly described the period as one in which ‘many things were attempted for the first time, and many things were attempted for the last time’. Eisenstein’s contemporary analysis is more acute: ‘The tragedy of today’s “leftists” [= LEFists?] consists in the fact that the still incomplete analytic process finds itself in a situation in which synthesis is demanded.’²⁰

Throughout the 1920’s montage cinema had in any case been the exception rather than the rule, which was perhaps epitomised by *Aelita*’s romantic extravaganza about converting the Martians

¹⁴ to Socialism, culminating in happy inter-planetary marriage. While montage was relatively acceptable to the cinema industry in its anthropocentric, narrative-oriented forms, as in the films of Kuleshov and Pudovkin, film-makers such as Eisenstein and Dovzhenko, exploiting more disjunctive, often non-anthropocentric forms of montage in fictional cinema, encountered greater problems. Vertov had greater difficulties still, since documentary was an area which officialdom deemed necessarily transparent and utilitarian and certainly not susceptible to disjunctive Kino-Eye montage treatment.

Thus Vertov was able to secure only one major project, *A Sixth of the World*, between 1924 and 1927. Sovkino sacked him on January 4, 1927 and ordered him to leave Moscow.²¹ He lost support from *Pravda* at the same time. His last article published there seems to be July 24, 1926, and letters by Editorial Board members of the paper calling for his reinstatement at Sovkino were denied publication. Vertov left for the Ukraine with Svilova, his editor and wife, and Mikhail Kaufman, his cameraman and brother: Kino-Eye's 'Council of Three' since April 3, 1922. Between 1926 and 1928 Vufku (Pan-Ukrainian Committee of Cinema and Photography) were engaged in a blockade of Sovkino-distributed films. The company took over the film which Vertov was to have made for Sovkino to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Revolution – *The Eleventh Year* – and made it the condition for his making *Man with a Movie Camera*.²² Vertov's account of the prejudices of the Kiev and Kharkov studios of Vufku suggests that he had considerable difficulty gaining their backing for the film.²³ And his letters to Fevralski evince great anxiety about its ever being seen. Completed by Vertov by December 1928, the film was released on January 8, 1929. Fevralski assures us that *Pravda* both published Vertov's notes on the film – albeit heavily edited – and reviewed the film favourably. However, just in the light of the apparently very restricted exhibition of Vertov's earlier films and of *Three Songs for Lenin*, *Lullaby* and *Three Heroines*, it seems improbable that *Man with a Movie Camera* was seen by many Soviet viewers on its release.²⁴

The dichotomy mentioned above between stated political aims and actual social practices was fundamental through the late 1920s and beyond. The materialist dialectic demands the identification of the ideological determinants of this dichotomy and enables them to be re-integrated into a theoretical synthesis of everyday activities. It exposes the falsity of the dichotomy, and reveals its masking as an ideological operation with repercussions such that the wage-labourer is allowed – indeed, encouraged – to collude in his/her own oppression, hence perpetuating labourer/consumer differentials. Such collusion was fostered by the artistic practices which developed into the idealising, closed fictional models of Soviet socialist realism. Vertov's materialist theory of cinema, grounded in a concept of ideological struggle, countered such mis-

cognitions by arguing for a recognition of the relation of labour to production and the appropriation of the product.²⁵ The essential concomitant of this was Vertov's struggle against the forms of realist fiction as irredeemable vectors of the dominant ideology. *Man with a Movie Camera* accordingly treats in parallel the problematics of cinematic form and of labourer/consumer (rarely identifiable as separate individuals). The film aims to take the spectator from a position of unreflective consumption of cinema to one of actively participating in producing the film's meanings, and from a position of economic exploitation to one of recognising that situation and its means of operation. Such a recognition of the spectator's situation within the social relations of an increasingly capitalist mode of production can be seen as the essential pre-condition of class struggle.

Most markedly from 1927 through the 1930s, the censorship of Vertov's writings deprives us of empirical support for this account of the film's project (the foregoing summary of his theory of cinema draws almost exclusively on material written before 1927-28). The political censorship of the period of *Man with a Movie Camera* would in part explain the film's inexplicitness – indeed, ambiguity – about its project, an ambiguity enabling it to be presented as politically acceptable.

II The Film

Man with a Movie Camera is easiest approached in terms of a widespread 1920s genre, the city documentary, exemplified by Mikhail Kaufman's *Moscow* and by *Rien que les Heures, Berlin, Rain* and *A Propos de Nice*. The most consistent thread in the film's syntagmatic organisation is that of a Day in the Life of a Soviet City. Coupled with the Film Construction Process, which often cuts across, rather than parallels the Day in the Life structure, this authorises a breakdown of the film into seven sections:

- 1 A Credo, or, in Barthes' analysis of classical rhetoric,²⁶ an Egressio, designed to show off the orator's, or in this case the film's capacities (shots 1-4).*
- 2 Induction: The Audience for the Film (shots 5-67).
- 3 Section One: Waking. This comprises the whole series beginning and ending with the Waking Woman (shots 68-207).
- 4 Section Two: The Day and Work Begin. This concludes with the introduction of the first editing segment (shots 208-341).

* Shot numbers are given to indicate the placing of segments etc within the film. A shot-by-shot breakdown of *Man with a Movie Camera* has yet to be published. The breakdown used here is based on a conflation of the National Film Archive 35 mm print and the 16 mm British distribution prints.

- 16 5 Section Three: The Day's Work (shots 342-955).
6 Section Four: Work Stops, Leisure Begins (shots 956-1399).
7 Coda: The Audience for the Film (shots 1400-1716).

However, in accordance with Vertov's Kino-Eye theory, *Man with a Movie Camera*, perhaps more than any other film ever made, refuses any empiricist construction of given phenomenal reality. As Vertov noted in a posthumously published article from 1928: 'This complex experiment brutally contrasts "life as it is" seen by the eye armed with a camera ("Kino-Eye") with "life as it is" seen by the imperfect look of the human eye.'²⁷ Much of dominant cinema is content to concentrate on only the latter of these two, to abstract from phenomenal reality and in so doing to assign an assumed coherence to it, that is, to treat the social totality as a given aggregate. Its operation corresponds, therefore, to the untheorised operation of abstraction attacked by Marx in the 1857 Introduction. Beyond this, Marx proposes the further movement from the unexplicated nature of the abstraction, through theoretical conceptualisation of the components of this abstraction, back into concrete reality. Vertov suggests the necessity for a similar double movement: 'The analysis (from the unknown to the known) and the synthesis (from the known to the unknown) were not . . . in contradiction but on the contrary were found to be indissolubly linked to each other.'²⁸ Whereas dominant forms of cinema tend to proffer the construction of a false coherence out of the chaos of phenomenal reality – a descriptive process – *Man with a Movie Camera* engages in a process of synthesis – a theoretical practice of explication. It does so by reconstructing its objects in terms of theory (there are two objects here: more accessible to us now, cinematic forms, and less accessible to us now, the social formation obtaining in Soviet cities in the late 1920's). This is the process of the dialectic mentioned above based on the opposition of Kino-Eye and human eye. The synthesis of this dialectic is the terminative object, the film in the can. In its turn, this object presupposes an addressee, the notionally ideal spectator/reader. The dialectic of discourse based on these two finds its synthesis in the potentiality of an ideal reading situation. Reading thus becomes the final part of the film's process of transformation. In order to make the film intelligible – not in the commonsense terms of a dominant ideology – the reader is forced to read meaning back into the text of the film precisely because of its own theoretical practice. As Vertov proclaims, 'not Kino-Eye for the sake of Kino-Eye, but for the truth',²⁹ truth here being envisaged neither as immanent nor as transcendent, but as something discovered only in *process*. Crucially, this politicises the act of reading. The formal determinant of this is the film's montage 'intervals', the gaps, the discontinuities between the individual shots, its disjunction of its representations of phenomenal reality: 'Everything depends on this or that juxtapositioning of visual

features. Everything lies in the intervals.' Montage is thus conceived as '*the organisation of the visible world*' and not '*the collage of separately filmed scenes*' and hence as a means of dispersal of meaning through and across the film.³⁰ This de-familiarisation generates a kind of *ostranenie* (making-strange) working throughout the film. More specifically, what is activated here is an invocation of the paradigmatic. This entails theorising the gaps of an 'inadequate', 'incomplete' series of shots, thus becoming cognisant of the ideologically determined constructions of reality and of our perceptions of it. This work is activated by the multi-dimensional framework of ideas constituting the paradigmatic. The spectator is then able to choose which meanings to confer upon specific combinations of images, whilst recognising that both framework and choice are ideologically informed. This activity differs radically from that engendered by films giving primacy to the syntagmatic, which occludes the choices already made and their ideological determinations. This distinction corresponds closely to Lenin's 1901 distinction, cited by Vertov himself, between the 'popular' and the 'vulgar' writer. Whereas the 'popular writer . . . teaches [the reader] to go forward independently', the 'vulgar writer . . . hands out "ready-made" all the conclusions of a known theory, so that the reader does not even have to chew, but merely to swallow what he is given'.³¹ *Man with a Movie Camera* effects the transformation proposed by Stephen Heath, who adopts Vertov's term, 'intervals': 'The relations of the subject set by film – its vision, its address – would be radically transformed if the intervals of its production were opened in their negativity, if the fictions of the closure of these intervals were discontinued, found in all the contradictions of their activity.'³² The 'intervals' of *Man with a Movie Camera* reintroduce, in Heath's terms, heterogeneity, contradiction and history. Since the processes of signification determine any apprehension of signifieds, the film's theoretical reconstruction of cinematic forms will be examined before its theoretical reconstruction of the contemporary social formation.

IIA The Film's Theoretical Reconstruction of Cinematic Forms

Vertov's publicity for *Man with a Movie Camera*'s première announces the film's primary concern as the theoretical investigation of film language:

'*Man with a Movie Camera*, recording in six reels. Spectators are advised that this film is an experiment in the cinematic transposition of visible phenomena, without titles, without sets, without studio. This experimental work aims to create an absolutely

- 18 cinematic language, authentically international, based on a total departure from the languages of theatre and literature.³³

Crucially, this ‘theoretical and practical operation on the front of cinematic documentary’³⁴ does not expel signified and referent to concentrate exclusively on the material substrate of film.³⁵ *Man with a Movie Camera* confronts the problematics of signification from which the bulk of ‘structural’ film retreats. This differentiates Vertov’s project at the outset from that of the ‘structural’ film branch of the avant-garde. And as indicated in Part IV, it makes highly suspect any attempt to read back into Vertov the concerns of current avant-garde practices. At the same time, clearly, *Man with a Movie Camera* distinguishes itself even more radically from the dominant cinematic modes, both documentary and fictional, of ‘realist representation’, with their disavowal of the processes of signification in favour of transparency.

The film’s theoretical reconstruction of cinematic form is principally realised in its elaboration of an indeterminate structure with few parallels in the history of cinema. *Cahiers du Cinéma*’s remarks about the structure of Vertov’s films in general apply with particular aptness to *Man with a Movie Camera*. The film is thought of not ‘as an expressive totality composed of indiscriminately permutable parts’, but, as in Althusser’s concept of complex unity:

‘as a differential and contradictory structuration such that each shot, without ever having value as a part for the whole, stands as a disaligned [décalé] and provisional representative of all the others, each shot of the film taking on this role of active reflection. . . . Each “view” comprises all the rest, but without totalising them: it is the card in play in an interminable game, the provisional effect of a discontinuous process.’³⁶

The key determinant here is the film’s invocation of the paradigmatic. This is most clearly evidenced – many other examples will emerge throughout this article – in the film’s editing segments. For editing is the most obviously paradigmatic stage of film-making, the point at which shots are included or discarded (contrast Vertov’s stress on the selections determining *every* stage of film-making: ‘Every “Kino-Eye” film is in montage from the moment one chooses a subject until the final appearance of the celluloid’³⁷). Even in films ostensibly dealing with making films, it is the part of the overall process which is invariably omitted – an act of editing itself, of ideological self-censorship. *Gimme Shelter* stands as one of the few exceptions, though its investigation of the work really involved in editing is cut short by its obsession with film as evidence and by its narrative context celebrating the Rolling Stones. *F for Fake* entraps itself differently: in Welles’s self-conscious auteurism. Of paramount importance here is the fact

that such films never posit the question of the editing of the films they themselves constitute. *Man with a Movie Camera*, to the contrary, makes fully explicit through its own practice the paradigmatic nature of editing. The clearest instance is its first editing segment (shots 336-74). This comprises three kinds of image apart from those of Svilova, the actual editor of *Man with a Movie Camera*, herself: filmstrip images, still images filling the screen and moving images filling the screen. In terms of their use or otherwise elsewhere in the film, these images fall into five groups:

- 1 Images on filmstrip or filmstrip and stills which are activated in the editing segment and incorporated later in the film.
- 2 Images from earlier in the film which are frozen to stills and reactivated later.
- 3 Images on filmstrip or stills which may or may not be activated but are incorporated earlier or later.
- 4 Images on filmstrip and/or stills which are merely activated within the segment but not used elsewhere in the film.
- 5 Images on filmstrip or stills which are neither activated within the segment nor appear elsewhere in the film.

The last two categories are the most fascinating. The fourth raises questions – examined more fully later – of what constitutes the film's diegesis; mere activation or incorporation into a defined series of shots? and if the latter, defined by action, continuity or what? And the final category enables the film to include shots which it edits out. This paradox is neither flippant nor inconsequential. For in a vital sense the editing of the film – indeed, of any film – is incomplete within it; it is 'completed' only by the spectator's reading of it. Significant here is the reintroduction of Svilova into the Coda's final crescendo (shots 1580-1669), especially in the segments whose montage complements her eyes with the projector beam in the auditorium. The editor, as it were, oversees the film's presentation of fragments of the phenomenal world to the spectator, while refusing to *dictate* any reading of these montage fragments.

In such ways, *Man with a Movie Camera* virtually defines the closure of dominant cinematic forms as a disavowal of the paradigmatic. The film reduces the syntagmatic to a minimum: there is little possibility of fantasising about what happened before its beginning or after its ending – only of thinking through the paradigms of its construction. To this end, the film refuses closure and continually dislocates any conventional syntagmatic patterns. Apart from the Man with the Camera, played by Mikhail Kaufman, none of the figures shown in the Waking Section, for instance, is ever seen again in the film. The Coda refuses to gather up any substantial reprise of the film's preceding images. Even in its final segment (shots 1701-15) the film introduces two new objects, the more remarkable being a car driven along railway tracks.

- 20 Committed to investigating, not relaying ideological constructions, *Man with a Movie Camera* implacably bars the wholesale importation of any such constructions into it. Right from its opening shots – the exact function of its Egressio – it proclaims its own capacity for the production of meaning. This process of meaning-production diffuses ideological constructions so that they can be read as such. Meanings are read from the film *not* through any simple re-presentation of an anterior reality in the form of a closed history, but through the film's placing of shots within itself. It is in this sense – and no other – that Vertov refers to the film as an ‘indissoluble organic whole’.³⁸ One index of this organicism is the film’s explicit phasing-in of *énonciation* in the form of transitional shots or segments used as punctuation – or rather, articulations – between segments. Vital in all of these is their refusal of the straight cut, dissolve or whatever device is conventionally used to switch us directly from one segment to the next and thus to spirit away the processes of construction of the film before us. Most notable here are the iris in and out, the static filmstrips on the editing table, the lowering of the camera lens and the introduction of the self-demonstrating camera which separate off the main sections of the film. Shots of the camera filming itself (eg shots 598 and 615, stills 22 and 24) – long before Godard’s dream of it – similarly break up segments of the film. The film’s internal generation of meaning is again pointed up through the recurrent motif of filming as activation (much as in those parts of *Tout Va Bien*’s factory segment where characters begin to move only as the camera tracks past them): the Egressio activating the whole film, the cinema orchestra poised ready to play in the Induction and activated only when the projector’s carbon arcs ignite (shots 50-4), the camera waking the homeless (eg shots 167-74 and 221-2), the fountain in front of the Bolshoi Theatre which spouts only as it begins to be filmed (shot 284), the generation of light only as the Man with the Camera starts to film in the mine (shot 730) and so on. And beyond these instances are the insistent irruptions through the film of the Film Construction Process: the processes of shooting, editing and viewing of the film.

Man with a Movie Camera therefore builds up its own memories in and through itself. This is why, in a critical sense, it is an *eminently forgettable* film. It defines its signifiers only by means of its own syntagmatic – and far more, its paradigmatic – chains. As will be amplified later, these paradigmatic chains frequently rework and redefine the film’s signifiers. This operation parallels twinned emphases in Lacan’s work: his noting that meaning is fixed only at the last term of a sentence³⁹ and his concomitant use of wordplay and intentional obscurity to indicate an unease even with that fixing of signifiers. The film’s radical play with signifiers demonstrates *ad absurdum* the fallibility of trying to impose on it any system of signification which denies heterogeneity

and contradiction. Almost as soon as the film establishes a recognisable 'system' for its ordering of shots, another 'system' undercuts that categorisation. Vertov's 1937 remarks on his editing procedure are pertinent to *Man with a Movie Camera*: 'All the images find themselves in a state of continuous transference right through to the end of the montage process.'⁴⁰ This ceaseless displacement of one pattern by the next is the film's overriding structural principle (the mechanics of this process are better seen in diachronic rather than in synchronic analysis, as in Part III).

The film's theoretical reconstruction of cinematic forms necessitates the exposure and reworking of dominant cinema's denial of its own processes of transformation, or in other terms, its soldering of *énonciation* onto *énoncé*. The film's reworking of the formal assumptions underlying such cinematic modes can be ranged in a spectrum from absolute rejection (eg of notions of character) to qualified acceptance (eg in the Day in the Life structure). The purpose of the former will be clear from the preceding paragraphs. The latter end of the spectrum principally serves the interests of structural coherence. Without such supports the film would in all probability be totally unwatchable. To include them, obviously, is neither a cop-out nor an instant recipe for recuperation. The current analysis will examine first the film's refusal of the assumptions underlying certain formal components of dominant cinema. Of these, the central assumption is that of diegetic coherence, which the film rejects but which it also radically – in the word's fullest sense – reworks. Three other components the film has no or very little truck with: character and humanist identification, narrative structures and consistent motivation of actions. The second group includes elements used as syntagmatic props – even if in a highly irregular and disrupted manner – most of which serve to focus the film's critique of the contemporary social formation: the Day in the Life structure, thematisation and the use of certain figures as syntagmatic threads. The last group again supplies structural coherence but comprises components of dominant cinema which are inflected so as to focus on signifiers instead of on character or plot, and as such are mostly used consistently throughout the film: climactic rhythm, rhythmic balances, marking and anchor shots. These terms will be explicated in the ensuing analysis of their operations. The reworking they effect provides the foundation for the film's generation of forms of signification very different from those of dominant cinematic modes. Examples will emerge throughout both this part of the article and in Part IIB.

As already implicit, *Man with a Movie Camera* does not simply expel diegesis, as do many 'structural' films. Nor does it sheer off from it into a painterly abstractionism, as does *Berlin* with its whirling circles, spirals and diagonal patterns. Nor, moreover, does it limit itself to the occasional departures from a dominant diegesis

- 22 characterising more politically pointed 1920s city films than *Berlin* such as *Rien que les Heures* and *A Propos de Nice*. *Man with a Movie Camera* on the contrary retains diegetic elements, but reworks them in such a way as to expose their means of functioning as well as to open up forms of signification capable of raising an enormous range of questions both about the conventions of cinematic forms and about the contemporary social formation.

The construction of diegetic space and time is perhaps the principal cinematic means of fixing representations of the phenomenal world as some inviolable reality. It is a construction which coherently organises, but rarely challenges, our ways of seeing the world. In an unpublished note on *Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov writes: 'The conflict between the space and time of ordinary vision and the space and time of cinematic vision constitute the motor force of the documentary *Man with a Movie Camera*'.⁴¹ As early as 1923, and in contradistinction to the fictionally-oriented homogenisations of Kuleshov's 'creative geography', he asserts space and time in cinema to be purely cinematic constructions: 'I . . . the Kino-Eye . . . have set you down in a most amazing room, which did not exist until now. . . . In this room are twelve walls filmed by me in various parts of the world. . . . The mechanical eye experiments by stretching time, breaking up its motions, or vice versa, absorbing time into itself, swallowing up the years'.⁴² *Man with a Movie Camera*'s 'montage in time and space' constructs such dissociations of 'normal' perception of reality so as to demolish any notion of the film having a single, multiple or even dominant diegesis.

To this end, the film eschews all forms of diegetic spatial organisation used in contemporary documentary films. First, its refusal of intertitles entails a rejection of any verbal 'explanation' and homogenisation of groups of shots, such as the moving water/bobbins montage of *Turksib*. Second, its montage 'intervals' entail its ousting of continuity between shots within any specifically defined scene in favour of its predominant, but still irregularised, principle of alternating montage. Hence also its refusal of such rhythmic/lyrical continuity as is found in *La Tour*, which elegantly matches its movements, or in *Rain*, constructed almost entirely on matches of movement and texture. Further, this involves a refusal of the master shot, the most common means of the spatial fixing of shots within specifically defined scenes. Thus the film includes no more than a dozen master shots, and then invariably for the purpose of subverting 'the authority' with which dominant cinematic modes invest them.

What occurs, then, in *Man with a Movie Camera* is a structured intersection of differing forms of spatial construction which reworks and progressively undermines the notion of coherent diegetic space. In this respect the overall process of the film can be

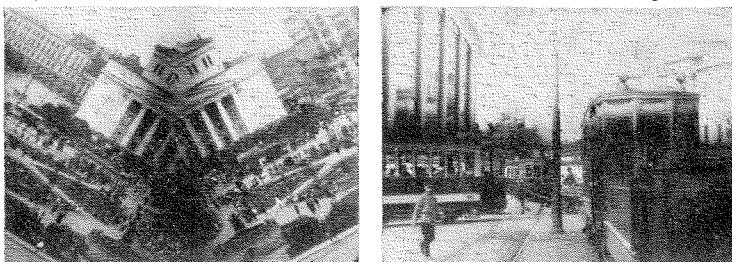
described as a movement from the diegetic coherence of the auditorium of the Induction – a coherence implying a relatively inactive, non-reflexive form of cinematic consumption – through the processes of labour, particularly those of filming and editing, back to a viewing situation in the auditorium of the Coda which is informed by these and promotes far more active reflection on the processes of cinematic construction. Given the film's promotion of the Film Construction Process, it is no accident that most of its very few coherent diegetic spaces, defined here as those including a master shot, expose to us the processes of production of the film before us: filming, editing and viewing. The Film Construction Process, in other words, is the absolute precondition of diegetic coherence or incoherence. The auditorium of the Induction (shots 6-67) even *opens* with a master shot, albeit printed in reverse so that the seat numbers read the wrong way round. The first editing segment (shots 336-74) is also spatially coherent. But even this soon in the film the master shot is much delayed and the segment placed so as to interrupt the Man with the Camera filming the new-bourgeois groups leaving the station.

The process of *Man with a Movie Camera*'s undermining of notions of coherent diegetic space is clearly best illustrated by diachronic analysis. This can be seen on a small scale in the analysis of six segments from the film in Part III. For the purposes of the present analysis of the whole film, however, the means of such undermining can be seen at four levels: within shots, between consecutive or dispersed shots, within segments and between segments.

Even within the shots, then, the film often works against any simple *recognition* of objects within the phenomenal world. Four processes can be discerned here. First, many shots of the tram junction by the Moscow Trades Union Building (seen in stills 2 and 11) alternate three-dimensional depth of field with a two-dimensional flatness as trams cross the field of vision and obliterate the view. As Michelson notes, this pulls the spectator back to a constant awareness of the screen's two-dimensionality:⁴³ a concern examined far more thoroughly in, say, the more abstract *Ballet Mécanique*. Second, dissolves are used in one segment to conjure up successively a swimming lesson from a bare yard, a magician from a hedge, swimmers from empty water and carousel horses from behind their tarpaulins (shots 990-3). Split screen and superimposition shots are employed in a variety of ways: to 'collapse' streets and the Bolshoi (shot 1511, still 1), to slice off the tops of trams (eg shot 1440, still 2), or in differing scales so that the Man with the Camera appears like Gulliver in Lilliput or Brobdignag, towering over a miniature city or clambering out of a beer glass (eg shots 1203 and 1206). Lastly here, the film exploits *ostranenie* on the local level in shots of unrecognisable objects: most spectacularly, the whirling patterns of light on the

- 24 screen in the Coda (shots 1421-3) and the superimposition of spindle-like objects and something resembling a sewing-machine flywheel (shot 1451, still 3).

Man with a Movie Camera exploits *ostranenie* similarly between consecutive or dispersed shots. Such *ostranenie* cuts include that from the junction with a banner advertising the Jubilee Edition of Gorky's works – a shot including a traffic signal which is in no way compositionally highlighted – to an extreme low-angle shot

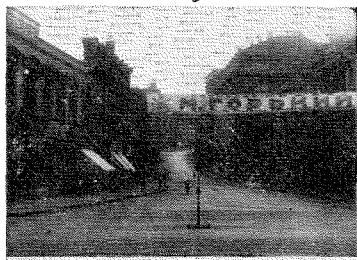


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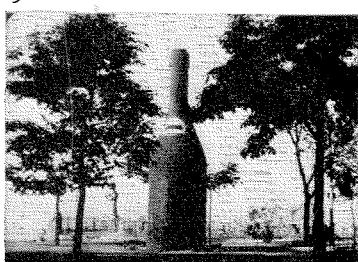
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of the signal, framed obliquely to the general shot so that the signal is silhouetted against the sky (shots 127-8, stills 4-5). Another example is the giant bottle, presumably a bar, which strangely appears and disappears with slightly different reframings of a café terrace (eg shots 76 and 78, stills 6 and 7). Such reframing can operate on a larger scale across the film: the recurrence of the same bannered junction in seemingly different guises through the film, or the reframings of the machine glueing seals onto cigarette packets such that it is barely recognisable as the same machine. A second means by which diegetic spatial coherence is called into question between shots is the 'oscillations' in the Coda whereby a spatially defined audience is seated watching a film – our film, *Man with a Movie Camera* – in which we are sometimes fully involved – their screen is our screen – and from which we are repeatedly pulled back into – again – our film, *Man with a Movie Camera*. Similarly, there is an insistent 'oscillation' between our seeing the Man with the Camera filming the new-bourgeois groups leaving the station and our seeing the groups he is filming (shots 307-30). Third, jokes are based on directional matches between consecutive shots in different diegetic spaces: the ambulance and the fire engines (seemingly) speeding into each other (shots 557-69), the goal-keeper who leaps up (to appear) to be speared by a javelin (shots 1133-4). Jokes are alternatively constructed on visual rhymes: the Waking Woman's early morning blinking paralleled with the opening and closing of Venetian blinds and the alternating blurriness and clarity of her view of some blossom which is intercut with focus-pulls of the camera lens (shots 187-203).

Assumptions of coherent diegetic space and continuous action are broken down in two principal ways within segments. On a modest scale, for instance, the coherence of the netball segment (shots 1115-31), complete with master shot and consistent matches on movement, is undercut by slow-motion shots of the ball being netted. More important, however, are the segments constructed on principles similar to, but subversive of those of Kuleshov's 'creative geography'. According to Kuleshov, successive shots linked by eyeline matches etc can be read as coherent diegetic spaces even if they were actually filmed 1,000 miles and ten years apart. In many of its alternating montage segments between seer and seen – themselves foregrounding the film's central opposition between human eye and camera eye – *Man with a Movie Camera* exposes such Kuleshovian readings for exactly what they are: fictional homogenisations, fabrications assuming continuity across shot/reverse-shot. Thus in the athletics and horse-track segments (shots 1003-41) spectators react at normal shooting speed to participants who are put through a range of slow and normal shooting speeds, as well as being freeze-framed and then set in motion once more. Again, differently, alternating montage interweaves shots

- 26 of a girl looking out from a spinning carousel with shots of the crowd which she could be read as looking at but for the fact that the crowd is spinning in the *same* direction as the carousel (shots 1180-7). Some of the film's alternating montage crescendos have a similar effect. In the 'eye-vertigo' segment (shots 457-532), for instance, each of the eye's movements cue the camera movements in the following shot. When the segment climaxes with single-frame editing, persistence of vision enables the spectator to 'see' both seer and seen 'simultaneously': a precursor of *Numéro Deux*'s video fade-ins of full-face shots of both brother and sister as they converse from opposite ends of a table.

Such assumptions – which evidently extend beyond Kuleshov and his contemporaries – are also criticised between segments. The shooting gallery segment (shots 1224-51), for example, has a long delayed master shot whose 'authority' as such is fast undermined by the construction of the following segment on the basis of alternating montage between another woman, shooting in the same gallery, and a crate of beer bottles which she appears to be shooting away (similarly to the comic segment in *Zvenigorod* where the Ukrainians shoot blind over their shoulders to topple more and more Poles from the tree in which they have all – somehow – been hiding). Assumptions of diegetic spatial coherence are undercut differently in relation to the segments of the children watching the magician (shots 1080-96) or of the various people watching someone making music with bottles, spoons and washboard (shots 1287-1386), neither of which segments has any master shot. The first recontextualises some of its spectators from filmstrips earlier seen in Svilova's editing room, and the second carries over one woman from its audience into a new alternating montage series based on the same shot of her looking, but looking this time at multiple superimpositions which could be seen only in a cinema.

Enough has already been said to indicate the film's construction of geographically 'impossible' diegetic spaces. Outstanding examples would be the interpolation of stock shots of Moscow into series of shots filmed in Ukrainian locations some 1,000 miles away.⁴⁴ One of the most striking examples is the intercutting of two shots taken from the Bolshoi with two of revolving doors at a hall in the Ukraine advertising – fittingly – a concert (shots 378-81). Another remarkable example is the series of shots interleaved in alternating montage with shots of a car speeding across the screen (shots 934-40, stills 8-11 of shots 934, 936, 938 and 940). The first shows the Man with the Camera filming at a street junction in the Ukraine, the second his camera filming alone at the junction, the third him filming (in different clothes) at the Petrovka Street junction in Moscow and the last him filming at the junction by the Moscow Trades Union Building.

This last example points up how the film makes manifest nonsense of any linear time scale which might be assumed to govern



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a film adopting a Day to Night structure (contrast here the clocks reminding us of the time of day in *Berlin*). Since in *Man with a Movie Camera* the film itself, and not any diegesis, governs its contents, the Man with the Camera is eminently capable of being 'everywhere', 'simultaneously'. On one occasion he sets up his camera low on the side of a train eleven shots before the shots of the engine wheels presumably filmed from that set-up (shots 302 and 313-7). By the time the engine wheels are seen, he is already filming the new bourgeois groups leaving the station. Linear time scale is subverted within single shots by the use of reverse-motion (Vertov's 'negative of time'⁴⁵): chess and draughts pieces which are swept onto their boards (shots 1220 and 1222), street scenes in which people, trams and horses and carts walk and run backwards (shots 1558 and 1672). Overlapping montage serves the same function: consecutive shots from different angles of the same footballer heading the ball (eg shots 1137-9), the train which careers towards the camera for a few frames and then begins its journey again (shots 1588-9). Linear time is again called into

- 28 question in the duplication in horizontal split screen of a shot of a typing pool so that the two halves are out of sync (shot 1445, still 12).

Character in any psychological sense is clearly inimical to *Man with a Movie Camera*'s project. For it would impose on the film a humanist ideology of the individual and cause-effect chains seriously at odds with its theoretical investigation. both of cinematic forms and of the contemporary social formation. Neither the Man with the Camera, nor, in her section of the film, the Waking Woman is in any way identified as a character, the Man with the Camera relating to others only through the camera from which he is almost always inseparable. Such a conception of character marks off the film from even, say, *Turksib* and far more from the individualist humanism of the Eskimo, *Nanook of the North*, or from the sundry stories of prostitute, newspaper-seller and sailor which are overlaid on *Rien que les Heures'* impressionistic account of Paris.

For the same reasons, *Man with a Movie Camera* meticulously forestalls any humanist identification with the figures it shows, particularly through its predominant alternating montage. The pain of childbirth is thus diffused first by being intercut with shots of a wedding and of a funeral bier, and subsequently through intercutting with the first and only occasion in the film when the Man with the Camera is seen filming *still* photographs (shots 426-38).

Quite clearly the film has nothing that could be called a plot. Its refusal of any elements of narrative structure is usefully examined in terms of Barthes' hermeneutic and proairetic codes, which Barthes in *S/Z* notes as founding the irreversibility of the logico-temporal ordering of the classic text. Structured on a system of 'intervals' which demand that the spectator construct the film's meanings, *Man with a Movie Camera* refuses the determinations of the hermeneutic code, that of the posing and resolution of enigmas. For the function of hermeneutics is – the word's original meaning in Biblical exegesis – that of revelation. Hence Barthes' labelling the code the 'Voice of truth'. The film's rejection of character and plot elements clearly entails its rejection of any such question as: Will the prostitute marry the sailor? Equally, the film offers no ready-made answer to questions such as: What can be done to eradicate these social injustices? Nor does its disjunctive montage allow it to generate the kinds of hermeneutic of the signifier variously informing such avant-garde films as *Wavelength*, *Zorns' Lemma* or *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*. A straightforward example of the film's rejection of any hermeneutic is the refusal of any view from the top of the chimney which the Man with the Camera climbs (shots 235-48).

Barthes' proairetic code, detailing the logic of ordinary actions and hence dubbed the 'Voice of empiricism', is obviously anathema to the film. Manifestly, the film has no equivalent to such

character-centred sequences of actions as: Nanook stalks the seal . . . etc. Only exceptionally is a character-centred series of actions rounded off: those of the Waking Woman, and of the Man with the Camera returning across the railway tracks after filming the train (shots 140-59). The vast majority of such sequences are simply suspended, cut off after their first term. Even when disjoined from any human figure such sequences of actions in the film rarely cohere into any proairetic pattern: the items of factory machinery which are first seen still, later set in motion and finally stopped for the day (shots 119-25, 236-57 and 956-64).

Man with a Movie Camera reverses conventional cinematic treatment of motivation. Most cinema does its best to explain in terms of psychological motivation all the actions which it presents within its diegesis, but never its own signifying processes; in its constant return to the Film Construction Process, *Man with a Movie Camera* foregrounds its own processes to the maximum. Conventionally, motivation is diegetic and usually ultimately guaranteed; in *Man with a Movie Camera* even delayed non-diegetic motivation is far from ensured, and largely reserved for the Film Construction Process. A clear example is the shot showing the Man with the Camera getting up from the ground after a number of coal barrows have been trundled over the camera (shots 261-2). Again, the shot of racks of film in the editing room is motivated only thirteen shots later by a reframing showing Svilova looking at them (shots 339 and 352). Far more often, however, the film withholds any such explanations. Occasionally, it plays elaborately on expectations of motivation, as with the shots of the poster for the 'fictional drama' film, *The Awakening of a Woman* (shots 74, 132 and 226). First shown only partially, with only an indecipherable part of its title visible, it is interleaved with shots of the Waking Woman asleep. At its next appearance it is similarly framed, but the writing has been blocked out. The whole poster, with all its text visible, is not shown until the next section of the film, and then revealed in full only as the Man with the Camera passes it.

The film's Day in the Life structure and its use of thematisation and of the Man with the Camera and the Waking Woman all serve as structural props, though in a highly fragmented and disruptive way. This latter notably distinguishes the Day in the Life of a Soviet City – nevertheless the film's major syntagmatic strand – from the Day in the Life structures of other 1920s city films. Thematisation, the organisation of shots by theme, is again highly irregular. Section Two of the film might be described as grouping shots under the headings of the Man with the Camera travelling around the city, trams and buses beginning to move, coal mines fuelling factories, a market opening and so on. Clearly, however, given the film's concern not simply to show the phenomenal world, such a breakdown can only be partial and inadequate. It overlooks the complex interaction, through overlaps, inserts and intercutting,

30 of the various forms of activity described as well as of the varied meanings which can be read from them. Though in no sense developed as characters, the Man with the Camera and, in her section of the film, the Waking Woman do serve as threads through the film. The Man with the Camera constantly refocusses the Film Construction Process, while the Waking Woman focusses the film's critique of the contemporary social formation, as do the Day in the Life structure and the film's use of thematisation.

The final group of elements also serves the interests of structural coherence. Most are used consistently through the film, but only because they focus on signifiers rather than on character or narrative elements: rhythmic climax and balances, and marking. Anchor shots likewise focus on signifiers, though they find no equivalent in dominant cinematic forms.

Not unlike dominant cinematic forms – whether the tightly-scripted plots of classic Hollywood or direct cinema's 'crisis structure' – *Man with a Movie Camera* does have an overall climactic rhythm. But this cumulative rhythm in the film relates only to signifiers⁴⁶: the increasing complexity of split screen shots and superimpositions especially of the tram junction by Moscow's Trades Union Building (shots 940 and 1,440, stills 11 and 2) and the increasing frequency through the film of its montage crescendos, themselves mathematically structured towards their single-frame climaxes: the 'eye-vertigo' segment (shots 457-532), that based on cigarette packeting and switchboard operators (shots 663-91), the 'work crescendo' segment (shots 790-927), the music-making segment (shots 1287-1399) and the final crescendo, almost all of whose shots are speeded up (shots 1509-1715). Significantly, several of these crescendos are built on the two forms of vision the film seeks to counterpose – the human eye and the camera eye – just as many of the film's 'diegetic' spaces mentioned above are structured on alternations between seer and seen.

Within this overall framework of increasing complexity, there are, moreover, rhythmic balances: the film's own equivalent of the calm-before-the-storm patterning of most genres of adventure film. All the film's montage crescendos except that of music-making are prepared for by an accelerating rhythm in the preceding shots, for example the speeded-up and tilted shots anticipating the 'eye-vertigo' segment. Further, there is a rhythmic balance between fast and slow-moving sets of images. Thus the 'eye-vertigo' segment is followed by that showing the ambulance and the fire engines being called out (shots 533-72). There is a similar rhythmic balance between segments largely soldering *énonciation* onto *énoncé* and segments exposing the friction between the two: the relative diegetic coherence of the marriage and divorce segments followed by the interweaving of wedding, death and birth, the last culminating in the shots of the Man with the Camera filming stills (shots 389-433). This is in turn followed

by the complex transitional segment, based particularly on the two Moscow junctions, which introduces the 'eye-vertigo' segment. Lastly, longer shots in the Waking and Leisure Sections of the film correspond to the stillness and relaxation they show, while faster-moving shots occur largely in the Work Section and Coda.

Man with a Movie Camera adopts a form of marking, which is, however, invariably non-anthropocentric, for instance the reintroduction of the dappled horse only two shots before it is freeze-framed (shots 328-330) and of the camera over the street preparatory to its being zip-panned through 180° for a specific metaphorical reading between the marriage and the divorce segments (shots 388-92 and 400). Vital qualifications here are that such marking is never guaranteed and is far more often withheld than offered. There is, however, one form of marking which is used consistently throughout the film: marking preparatory to transitions to a new segment or part of a segment. At the level of minutiae, this can take the form of the lengthening or shortening of a shot by a single frame in a montage crescendo where only such a level of variation is possible: equivalent in fact to Eisenstein's 'metric montage'. On a larger scale, it usually entails the disruption of an established pattern of shots by unexpected shots, such as those of the high-jumper interpolated towards the end of the motorbike/carousel segment (shots 1188-99). Unlike the interpenetrating montage fragments of *October*, these transition markers rarely specify the content of the subsequent segment, Vertov's film focussing on signifiers rather than on any diegesis.

Finally, *Man with a Movie Camera* gives structural coherence to its material by the use of anchor shots. The function of these is clearest in some of the film's montage crescendos: the eye in the 'eye-vertigo' segment (shots 457-532) or the Man with the Camera recurring as a constant term through almost all of the 'work crescendo' segment (shots 790-927). Anchor shots are used elsewhere in segments of otherwise seemingly disparate shots: the recurrence of one particular street junction (shots 225, 234 and 249) through a complexly interwoven series of shots including the Man with the Camera climbing the factory chimney, a boilerman stoking, factory machinery set to work, a Moscow boulevard and the poster of *The Awakening of a Woman*.

Man with a Movie Camera's structure, then, is indeterminate but also highly organised. Its promotion of the paradigmatic over the syntagmatic, especially through its refusal of the determinations of diegetic coherence and of character and narrative elements, facilitates what is probably the cinema's most extensive and radical investigation of its own signifying processes.

Also released is an extraordinary range of signifying forms. A clear index of this is the range based on the film's chief montage principle, alternating montage. Metz's taxonomy of the syntagmatic

32 units of the classic narrative film, the 'Grande Syntagmatique',⁴⁷ allows only two forms: the parallel syntagma and the alternating syntagma. Even a provisional inventory of forms of alternating montage in *Man with a Movie Camera* extends far beyond this. Alternating montage can signify simultaneity of actions (Metz's 'alternating syntagma'): the Man with the Camera walking to the Lenin Club/the proprietress of the alcohol store looking at him (shots 1265-70). Very occasionally, it can indicate simultaneity of actions building towards narrative climax (the 'alternating syntagma' again): the speeding ambulance/the injured man (shots 540-7). Conversely, it can make nonsense of assumptions of simultaneity: the Man with the Camera filming train and traps 'simultaneously' (shots 313-20). Recurrently through the film, it serves to contrast significant details: the intercutting of an abacus and a cash register with machine work (shots 632-5), an example to be examined in Part II B. Another form is parallelism: the film's frequent assimilation of the processes of filming and editing to the labour process in general. Or again, antithesis (Metz's 'parallel syntagma'): the new bourgeoisie being made up, shampooed, shaved etc versus workers constructing walls and washing curtains in a tub (shots 579-93). Lastly, one image series can be used to diffuse involvement with the other: the childbirth/the Man with the Camera filming stills (shots 426-38). These various forms of alternating montage, of course, constantly intersect with relatively continuously ordered segments or shot series, such as those of wedding and divorce (shots 389-417), mining (shots 730-6) or foundry work (shots 741-53).

The film's range of signifying forms can be further illustrated by two specific examples, both adopting alternating montage, both from the Coda and both acting as comments on cinematic forms. The first example is the segment of the self-demonstrating camera which opens the Coda (shots 1400-20). This begins with a shot of the cinema auditorium. Alternating montage then interweaves members of the audience with the camera and tripod which are stop-framed so as to show off their technical range. On this level the segment suggests the limitless capacities of the camera. But camera and tripod are filmed from differing angles as if corresponding to the differing angles of view on a theatrical presentation – no screen is ever seen – and the segment is followed by the whirling patterns of light mentioned above which can be read as 'erasure' and which introduce the film's first series of 'oscillation' shots (shots 1421-3). This emphatic reassertion of the cinema is given added force by a segment intercutting members of the audience with split screen shots, a further assertion of the potential of cinematic forms. Overall, then, the self-demonstration of the camera can be read as a *critique* of a naive, Constructivist/technicist adulation of the camera apparatus. The outstanding example is the series of four shots prefacing the final montage

crescendo (shots 1509-12). The second and fourth of these shots show a speeded-up pendulum oscillating fast back and forth. These can be read as meaning 'imminently'. The first shot uses superimposition in differing scales to show the Man with the Camera towering over a street crammed with tiny people, and gradually panning his camera round towards the camera through which we see him. The third is the celebrated shot (still 1) of the Bolshoi collapsing into itself. Taken together, the four shots can be read as proclaiming the imminent death of 'acted cinema': a pronouncement with grave historical irony given the subsequent course of Soviet cinema.

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Two further aspects of the film's invocation of the paradigmatic remain to be examined: recontextualisation and multiple-meaning (polysemy). Recontextualisation is achieved by repeating the same shot in different montage contexts, which confer different meanings upon it. It exemplifies *par excellence* the film's capacity to counter assumptions of fixed meanings for specific signifiers. The film's refusal of any dominant diegesis enables it to exploit recontextualisation far more extensively than, say, the statuary and Napoleon statuette of *October* or the reprises of bicycle wheels and of the eviction in *Kuhle Wampe*. Recontextualisation can thus set up a complex pattern of memories working across the film.

Appropriately, several examples focus on the Film Construction Process. The children which the segment with the magician recontextualises from the first editing segment have already been referred to. The Coda likewise recontextualises shots which have already been shown in various of their previous stages before reaching the screen: the shots of the new-bourgeois groups leaving the station, the freeze-framing of some of them preparatory to the first editing segment and finally the screening of some of them and of continuation shots of them (shots 309-30, 330-71 and 1515-53), or the set-up for the engine wheels of the train leaving the station, shots of the wheels and then the screening of continuation shots from these (shots 302, 313-7 and 1459-60). Other examples include the differing uses of vertically split screen shots whose two halves show streets tilted up towards each other, the camera moving forward through both halves (shots 301 and 414). First used as a transitional shot, on the second occasion this is inserted into the divorce segment where it assumes the specific metaphorical meaning of 'split paths in life'. Another example is based on the shot of a man showing a javelin left to right across the screen. This is first used as a critique of ballet, the javelin about to spear across a cut, the head of a dancer vainly bouncing up and down on the spot (shots 1313-4). When repeated, the shots form the basis of the joke of the goal-keeper about to save a... goal (shots 1333-4).

Polysemy is a crucial aspect of the film's project of not fixing signifiers, and clearly neither limited to recontextualisation nor

34 simply a function of the film's necessary ambiguity mentioned in Part I. One instance is the shots of the train intercut with the shots of the Waking Woman (shots 150-6). As she wakes, camera pans and tilts send the fast-passing train into vertiginous swirls. The intercutting here might be read in various ways: on a literalist level, the woman being woken by the passing train, or possibly waking from a nightmare, or more probably the disorientation of waking up. The subsequent intercutting – shots of the Waking Woman getting out of bed and a speeded-up shot of railway tracks filmed from a downward-angled camera mounted on the front of a train – could be construed variously as indicating the bewilderment of adjustment to waking life, the urgency of getting up or the restrictions which waking (and working?) life impose on the individual, particularly the blinkered life of someone of her class position (this will be picked up later). The film's open-ended structure neither dictates a single reading nor proposes indiscriminate choices within a range of possible readings, but rather directs the spectator towards readings promoting ideological awareness.

IIB The Film's Theoretical Reconstruction of the Contemporary Social Formation

Man with a Movie Camera itself gives four indicators of its concern with the Soviet social formation as related to urban and industrial development in the late 1920s. First, there is its marked geographical pluralism, different parts of the film having been shot in – at least – Moscow, Odessa and Kiev. The film's refusal to define its locale as that of any specific Soviet city supports the idea of a generalised reading: not so much a city film, more the analysis of a way of life. Second, the film eschews aerial shots. This absence would be extraordinary in a film both made in the period of the development of aerial photography and so seemingly concerned with exploring the possibilities of the camera etc – the shots of the Man with the Camera with a photogun à la Marey intercut with shots of biplanes (shots 1435-9) may be an oblique comment on this – were there not more important considerations: first, the creation of a composite Soviet city, and second, the commitment to avoid reducing this object of analysis to a given aggregate susceptible of instant untheorised comprehension like the concept of population elaborated by the classical political economists whom Marx attacks in the 1857 Introduction.⁴⁸ Third, the focus on urban rather than rural is marked by the fact that only one shot in the film shows any countryside, and then in no detail (shot 298). Lastly, a multitude of references – to NEP, to industrialisation etc – place the film's analysis as contemporary.

It should be noted initially that the film shows labour in none of the three ways familiar in capitalist societies. It is never seen as a drudge, as in, say, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (both novel and film), in Vidor's *The Crowd* or, for that matter, in the later novels of Dickens. Nor is labour presented in terms of individual creativity, as in the harking back of Morris — reputedly the first Briton to read *Capital* — to eighteenth-century village industry, a myth perpetuated in such films as Flaherty's 1931 *Industrial Britain*. Nor, finally, is labour mystified as ennobling, as in many other Grierson-produced documentaries. In marked contrast, *Man with a Movie Camera* shows labour as a process of transformation: from cotton bobbins being reeled to sewing, from the folding of cigarette packets through the packeting of cigarettes into them to seals being glued onto the packets. And the interconnectedness of different kinds of work is also stressed: mines and dams powering factories. The film concentrates on the process of work itself, not on the individuals performing it. The only individual worker singled out to any extent is the woman who folds cigarette packets. The montage's recurrent assimilation of the filming and editing processes to other forms of labour stands as a clear counterblast to the aesthetic position of a Lukács, conceiving art as a privileged terrain somehow standing outside the relations of production. As Svilova diligently works on editing, the Man with the Camera ceaselessly scurries about during the working day looking for set-ups, capering over bridges, having to retire before the scorching sparks of a foundry, chasing after fire engines and ambulance, and so on.

The theoretical reconstruction of cinematic forms analysed above serves specifically to deny the possibility of unquestioning, ideologically determined acceptance of the contemporary social formation presented in the film. Again, the key determinant here is the primacy of the paradigmatic over the syntagmatic. The extraordinary range of signifying forms thus released — especially of montage combination between both consecutive and widely dispersed shots — is invaluable for the film's theoretical reconstruction of the contemporary social formation. Here too, the paradigmatic is essential, for postulating alternatives to the forms of the existing order.

In his 'scenario' for *Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov himself outlines the terms of this aspect of the film's work, stressing the importance of 'the struggle of the old with the new . . . of the Revolution with the counter-revolution . . . of the co-operative with the exploiting individual, of the club with the bar, of physical culture with depravity' as essential features of 'the struggle against the lack of confidence in the building of socialism in the USSR. The camera witnesses the huge battle between the world of capitalists, speculators, factory-owners and bankers and the world of workers, peasants and colonial slaves.'⁴⁹

36 This sets up a paradigmatic framework capable of exposing the contradictions inherent in the contemporary social formation. This framework allows for choices and substitutions to be made between abstractions derived from the forms of social relations engendered by an increasingly capitalist mode of production. The film focusses on the major contradiction here: that between labour and capital. The critique of the contemporary social formation is developed through a set of oppositions which counterpose lack/excess, productivity/non-productivity, health/depravity and education/mystification. Through the continual juxtaposition of the social practices equated with class divisions, the film points up the incongruities and mystifications involved in these practices. Whereas its satire on NEP and on alcoholism is congruent with the Party line, the film's critique of existing relations of production transgresses this line in its references to contradictions which those stated policies elide.

A touchstone throughout this critique is Vertov's polemic for a Kino-Eye montage of actualities as against 'acted cinema' and related artistic practices designed for bourgeois consumption such as theatre and ballet. This is a crucial aspect of the ideological struggle entailed in the education/mystification opposition. Thus shots of the Bolshoi function as a kind of banner introducing both the film's segments showing NEP-type consumer goods (shots 94 and 284), while the death-knell of the Bolshoi described above is carried through to the film's very last reprise of the new bourgeois groups leaving the station. Vertov's bracketing together of 'acted cinema' and the new bourgeoisie extends to the juxtaposition of the Induction and the Waking Section. The relatively inactive cinematic consumption implied by the diegetic coherence of the first is thus paralleled with the consumer ethic exemplified in the second by the Waking Woman and the segments of luxury goods intended for NEP people. The Waking Woman's occupation is never made clear, but her class position is defined not only by her room(s) and her wearing styled lingerie (hence the montage's stress on her bra and slip), but also by the intercutting of her sleeping figure with the first shot of the poster for the 'fictional drama' film, *The Awakening of a Woman*, and with Perov's realist painting, *The Fishermen* (shots 74 and 72). It is in this class context that the railway track shot mentioned earlier takes on the signification of a 'blinkered path in life'. Likewise, the rhyming of the Waking Woman's morning blinking with the opening and closing Venetian blinds – coupled with her non-appearance thereafter in the film – hints at some fundamental incompatibility between her lifestyle and that of many outside the parameters set up by her room(s).

The critique of the contemporary social formation is prefaced by an exposition of the social inequalities proceeding from it. Only a few shots into Section One of the film, shots of two homeless

people, a man and a boy in tatters, are interleaved with a litter bin inscribed with the words 'Please Put Your Litter Here' (shots 79-82). The transferral of the sleep motif in alternating montage from the Waking Woman asleep in comfortable bed to these homeless people contrasts the two classes. Her silky stockings contrast with the functional woollen stockings of a homeless woman sleeping on a bench who appears to be woken by the camera, the distinction underlined by the camera focussing on her legs (shots 218-22).

All four sets of oppositions mentioned above inform the film's satire on NEP. The inclusion of alternative possibilities makes this satire more constructively critical than that of, say, Ilf and Petrov's novels, which barely attain even a moralistic distance from their object, and on the face of it, more politically optimistic than Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug*, which is overtly sceptical about the new order.

The fundamental opposition of productivity/non-productivity emerges most sharply in The Day's Work Section of the film. The non-productive new-bourgeois groups leaving the station at the end of The Day and Work Begins Section can find no place in The Day's Work Section beyond three shots showing them disappearing for the day into friends' homes (shots 373, 375 and 377). Significantly, it is the editing segment bridging these two sections which freezes their postures of supercilious indifference and phases them out of the film. The only other appearance of the new bourgeoisie in The Day's Work Section places them unequivocally in the context of being serviced by others: the hairwashing, shaving, manicuring etc set against the workers constructing walls, washing curtains etc (shots 576-603).

The film sets up a manifest contrast – partly through the use of concealed or visible camera – between the apparent vanity and self-consciousness of the new bourgeoisie and the 'natural' response of the proletariat before the camera, notably the post-Revolutionary orphan who scratches his armpit on being awoken, seemingly, by being filmed (shots 167-74). The same vanity marks the 'weightwatchers' (shots 1069-72 and 1097-1114). The second of these segments immediately follows that of the *magician*. Counterposing the excess consumption of the 'weightwatchers' is the physical culture which was promoted at the time and which is used to satirise it. The 'weightwatchers' are intercut, for instance, with shotputters whose aim seems, across the cuts, to be directed at the formers' heads. Ballerinas and dancers are assimilated into this critique as with the javelin 'directed' at the dancer vainly bouncing up and down. A woman with an expression of virtuous self-indulgence is seen unaccountably jogging up and down – before a shot reveals her foot in the stirrup of a horse simulator.

The excess satirised here finds its corollary in the inessential consumer goods spawned by NEP and designed for the new bour-

- 38 geoisie: wigs and rings, a stuffed dog and models of sewing-machine and bicycle, the last advertised as being available on hire-purchase terms (shots 95-109). The reappearance of model sewing-machine and bicycle is prefaced by a pointed historical reference to the necessary compromise of NEP: shots of a shop sign advertising trips on the steamboat *Lenin* and of a demonstration with the banner 'Welcome New Leaders' (shots 282-3). The bicycle is this time being ridden by a mannequin in a futuristic leisure outfit and is contrasted with a postman using his workaday trike-cart on his rounds. And the now-activated model sewing-machine echoes and counterpoints the real sewing-machines used elsewhere in the film by workers for production (eg shots 250 and 618-25). The folly of accepting such social excrescences as well as the capacity of the film's Kino-Eye montage to expose them are pointed up in a sequence of two shots following the model sewing-machine: a shutter raised on a window to reveal a notice for 'Pince-nez' and the elaborate *énonciation* shot involving a mirror swivelled through 150° which en route reflects the Man with the Camera cranking the camera.

Like theatre, luxury consumer goods trade on false impressions. Contrasted with, for instance, the perfunctory hair-combing of the women leaving work (shots 969-70) is the satire's constant return to cosmetics, manicuring etc, an industry whose targets are women (shots 576-97, 600-9 and 694-8). The last of these segments has the sharpest critique of this industry. Women's faces being made up are interwoven with payment at a cash register, the last shot of which is followed by a fleeting six-frame glimpse of a pistol being raised in the direction of the cash register.

Man with a Movie Camera's critique of alcoholism is in line with contemporary campaigns, as witness the 1929 film *For Your Health*. Just as the health/depravity opposition affords the positive base for the film's satire on the 'weightwatchers', so the critique of alcoholism in the Leisure Section is based on the education/mystification opposition, the counterposing of Communist clubs with alcohol drinking, Vertov's 'struggle of the club with the bar'. *Man with a Movie Camera* backs up these terms with its own promotion of Kino-Eye documentary as against 'acted cinema'. The series of segments involved (shots 1202-86) almost dramatise the Man with the Camera as an emblem of the Kino-Eye's ideological function: 'to help . . . the proletariat . . . to see clearly in the living phenomena surrounding us'.⁵⁰ After a pan showing an exotic poster for a film called *Manuela* playing, with bitter irony for Vertov's campaign, at a proletarian cinema, the Kino-Eye's power is emphatically reasserted with the first shot since the Egressio using superimposition in different scales, here showing the Man with the Camera towering over the city. But only three shots into the subsequent beer-hall segment he is reduced to having to climb out of a beer glass. At the end of the segment,

vertiginous drunken pans associate alcohol with religion – en route we see a church spire and a shop selling icons and candles – before steadyng up in front of the Odessa Railway Workers' Club, where people read and play draughts and chess. The capacity of the film to order its material through editing is reasserted in the next but one segment, showing the woman seemingly shooting away beer bottles. The Man with the Camera is then seen walking away from the alcohol store into a Lenin Club, where workers listen to the radio and play chess and draughts.

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The political situation outlined in Part I clearly imposed severe restrictions on any artistic practice seeking to deal with the contemporary social formation. Production conditions made this especially true for cinema. Historical material was evidently safer, as witness the spate of such films in 1928-9, including *October*, *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* and *The New Babylon*, and indeed, the re-titling of *The General Line* as *The Old and the New*. If satire on NEP and on alcoholism was more than condoned, critiques logically developing from the former into an analysis of the relations of production and of the new bureaucracy were actively discouraged. Hence *Man with a Movie Camera*'s relative inexplicitness about this part of its project. One obvious symptom of the pressures against any explicit statement of such a critique is the absence of any clarification of the labour/ownership relations governing the work shown in the film.

This said, some portions of the film's Work Section nevertheless counterpose the productive processes of industry as either labour or capital-intensive. The principal example starts from the seemingly unequivocal celebration of the efficiency of machine-sewing contrasted with the tedium and inefficiency of sewing by hand (shots 618-23 and 610-14) in segments analysed in Part III. But the assurance of this celebration is undercut both by the contemporary situation of the textile industry and by the subsequent segments of the film. As an essential basic consumer industry, the textile industry should ideally have been taken over by the state, but any such attempt was abandoned with the abolition of Glavtextil in 1927. This left it even more susceptible than previously to the production of luxury fabrics and garments for members of the new bourgeoisie such as the Waking Woman or those leaving the station (hence the late 1920's adoption of silk stockings as a cultural emblem of the new bourgeoisie, as in Romanov's *A Pair of Silk Stockings* and Eisenstein's 'Notes for a Film of Capital'). This problem was compounded by the 1928 crisis of State over-production of textile machinery which exacerbated the unemployment situation.

The critique of capital-intensive productive processes arising here is expanded in the film's subsequent five segments (shots 632-98) in terms of the class beneficiaries of mechanisation. Paradigms are set up between manual and mechanised labour, and between the

40 | needs of the proletariat and of the automated, communications-dependent orientations of a modern industrial society. A shot of machine-folded newspapers slithering off the press immediately precedes the segment showing the woman mentioned earlier folding packaging paper around a wooden stump and then throwing the packets over her shoulder for filling with cigarettes. The segment is framed by shots of a machine shunting boxes – themselves apparently machine-made – with the label ‘Password’ and the size of chocolate or cigar boxes. The subsequent montage crescendo is structured on the antithesis: filling cigarette packets/operating a switchboard. There follows a shot of typing and the cosmetics/cash register montage referred to earlier. The congruence between machine-made and new bourgeoisie on the one hand, and between manually made and proletariat on the other extends the critique of capital-intensive development. In the shots of the smiling cigarette packet folder, as of the sewing machinist before, this critique encompasses the illusory contentment offered to the worker by machinery. These five segments have echoes elsewhere through the film: the felt boots of mineworkers which sidestep the camera (shot 261), the homeless of the Waking Section who are doubtless unemployed, the bewildered-looking mechanic framed by an array of cogs which seem to overwhelm him (shot 253), the rhyming of water swirling over the brink of a (man-made) dam with printing rollers which it thus appears to be powering (shots 771-2), the compositional highlighting which links two women machine-winding cable with the cable of a traffic signal, controlled by a policeman, in the following shot (shots 630-1). The prefacing of these five segments by shots of an abacus with a nearby notice enjoining us to ‘Keep Silent, Please’ (to what, or whose ends?) and of a cash register – emblems, respectively, of the old and the new – hints at the development of the later 1920’s as a falling away from revolutionary ideals. The critique culminates in the shot of the pistol being raised, across a cut, on the cash register.

Many transitional shots extend this critique to State functionaries. The recurrent transitional shots featuring policemen using signals to direct traffic at road junctions (eg shots 127, 934 and 936, stills 4, 8 and 9) have an obvious enough symbolic value, underscored by such montage series as that meshing a woman (apparently a bureaucrat) speaking on an office phone with a policeman at a crossing signal, the series framed by shots taken from the Bolshoi (shots 381-6). Other transitional shots often show trams at the Petrovka Street and Trades Union Building junctions in Moscow (eg, respectively, shots 938 and 940, stills 10 and 11). Like the junctions with traffic signals these are always filmed with a static camera concentrating on continuous and controlled movement without any visible destination, seemingly condemned to a futile circularity. Other movements in the film reinforce this idea:

the speedway/carousel segment where motion is both circular and circumscribed (shots 1162-99) and the railway track shot mentioned above as being associated with the Waking Woman's class position. Indeed, the film's only(?) two series of actions which are closed both involve rails: the Man with the Camera returning across the railway tracks after filming the train (shots 140-59) and the train arriving at and leaving the station (shots 305-19). Trains speeding nowhere recur as transitional shots in the Coda, where there is also a segment intercutting members of the audience with shots of various forms of road transport moving in almost identical semi-circular arcs (shots 1466-1504).

Through its use of the paradigmatic, then, *Man with a Movie Camera* is able to set up particular referents, moving between them so as to construct a critique based upon a synthesis of the spectator's consciousness and the ideas presented by the film. The film, as stimulus, thus engages in catalysing a dialectical process. By using the above-mentioned sets of oppositions as the base for an (acceptable) satire on NEP and on alcoholism, the film is able to extend this into a more thorough-going critique of the social formation and of the relations of production it engenders. What is therefore achieved in *Man with a Movie Camera* is a realisation of a politicised, self-conscious cinema in accordance with Vertov's materialist theory of film.

III Diachronic Analysis of Shots 576-630

This part of the film follows the segment of ambulance and fire engines, and precedes the segments analysed above as a critique of the existing relations of production. Its relative unity as a group of segments is suggested by its being framed by similar transitional shots of a traffic junction. Its six segments are:

- 1 Worked for/working (shots 576-99, stills 13-23 for shots 589-99).
- 2 Haircutting and manicuring/cutting and splicing film (shots 600-9).
- 3 Sewing by hand (shots 610-14).
- 4 A transitional segment: filming as work (shots 615-7, still 24 for shot 615).
- 5 Sewing by machine (shots 618-23).
- 6 Identifying film rushes/winding by machine (shots 624-30).

The following shot breakdown lists shot number in the film, its length in frames, shot scale and the action shown. All shots are filmed from a static camera position except for the last. Camera angles at no point set up any consistent system; the few significant variations will be detailed as relevant in the analysis.

42 Table

<i>Shot number</i>	<i>Length in frames</i>	<i>Shot scale</i>	<i>Action</i>
<i>Shot number</i>	<i>Length in frames</i>	<i>Shot scale</i>	<i>Action</i>
<i>Segment 1:</i>			
576	46	MCU	A well-groomed woman wearing a white turban sits at a table and looks blankly ahead.
577	57	CU	A woman has mascara put on her right eyelash.
578	27	MCU	The woman of 576 puts her hand to her forehead, then smiles awkwardly as if (?) surprised by the camera.
579	42	CU	The woman of 577 smiles as her right eyebrow is made up.
580	169	MCU	A woman wearing coarse working clothes bends down out of frame, scoops up handfuls of mud-like substance and throws them onto a substructure (possibly wall-building). The woman of 577 smiles as her left eyebrow is made up and her right eyebrow retouched.
581	41	CU	The woman of 580 looks at the camera whilst still working and then looks back towards the substructure.
582	92	MCU	The woman of 577 has surplus eyebrow make-up wiped off with cotton wool.
583	40	CU	The woman of 580 smiles for a long time at the camera then turns back towards the substructure and recommences work.
584	73	MCU	A woman has her hair shampooed.
585	38	CU	The hands of a woman plunge lace curtains in and out of a wash-tub.
586	81	MCU	The woman of 585 continues to have her hair shampooed, smiling and nodding in conversation.
587	81	CU	The hands of 586 continue to wash the curtains.
588	80	MCU	The woman of 585 has her hair rinsed.
589 (Still 13)	77	CU	The hands of 586 now wring the curtains.
590 (Still 14)	78	MCU	A man with a chin beard and moustache has his right cheek lathered for a shave.
591 (Still 15)	55	CU	A hand strops a razor.
592 (Still 16)	54	CU	The man of 591 has his right cheek shaved.
593 (Still 17)	83	CU	Hands hone an axe on a grindstone.
594 (Still 18)	76	CU	The woman of 585 has her hair blow-dried and smiles, hairdresser wearing a bow-tie is now visible behind her.
595 (Still 19)	80	CU	



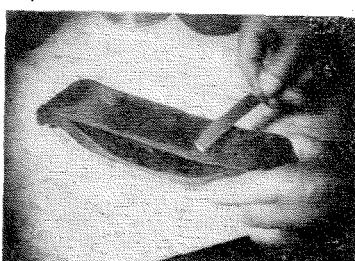
13



14



15



16



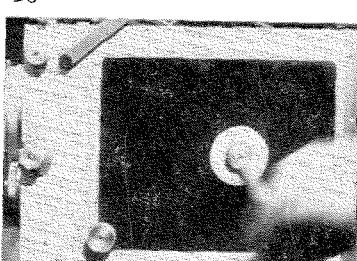
17



18



19



20

596 30 CU A hand cranks a camera.
 (Still 20)

597 83 CU The woman of 585 continues to have her hair blow-dried.

598 106 CU A camera, being cranked by the Man with the Camera, films itself in a mirror headed 'Specialist Shoeshiner from Paris'.

599 107 CU A shoeshiner's hands brush a man's shoe (speeded-up motion).
 (Still 23)

44



21



22



23



24

Segment 2:

- 600 67 CU Hands comb and cut hair of head seen from behind.
- 601 51 MCU The head of 600 is revealed to be that of a woman. In addition to the hands of the hairdresser, a smiling manicurist is now revealed as working on the woman's left hand.
- 602 51 CU The woman, seen from behind as in 600, has her hair cut.
- 603 79 MCU The manicurist of 601 shapes a finger-nail on the woman's left hand. The hairdresser is no longer visible.
- 604 76 CU Hands cut with a sharp knife between frames of a filmstrip held over the light-box of an editing table.
- 605 55 MCU The manicurist, shown as in 603, pushes back cuticles of the woman's fingers.
- 606 38 ECU The hands of 604 place film in a splicer.
- 607 25 ECU A hand from 604 dips a brush into a small bottle of editing cement.
- 608 42 ECU The splicer of 606. The brush paints cement onto the edge of the film. The hand clamps down the splicer lever onto the pieces of film.
- 609 54 MCU The manicurist, shown as in 603, cuts the woman's finger-nail.

<i>Segment 3:</i>				
610	28	MCU	A glum-faced woman is about to thread a needle.	45
611	20	CU	The face of the woman of 610.	
612	55	MCU	The woman pulls the cotton through the needle and picks up material from her lap.	
613	19	CU	Her face looks down.	
614	76	MCU	The woman tacks a hem.	
<i>Segment 4:</i>				
615 (Still 24)	27	ECU	Crab-like hands and arms cranking a camera are reflected in a convex lens, the lens surround itself showing its writing to be reversed.	
616	6	CU	A hand cranks a camera of the same type as is shown in 596.	
617	21	ECU	As 615.	
<i>Segment 5:</i>				
618	27	CU	A woman smiles as she works at a sewing-machine.	
619	40	CU	Hands set material in place on a sewing-machine.	
620	29	CU	Fly-wheel of a sewing machine, steadied by a hand.	
621	28	CU	The hands of 619 feed the material through the sewing-machine.	
622	39	CU	The woman of 618 smiles as she works at the sewing-machine.	
623	47	CU	The hands of 619 continue to feed the material through the sewing-machine.	
<i>Segment 6:</i>				
624	55	CU	A filmstrip whizzes over a lightbox and is brought to a halt.	
625	84	CU	A woman at a sewing-machine steadies wheel, bends back, bends forward, then steadies wheel again.	
626	88	MCU	Svilova, the editor of <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i> , takes a reel of film from one of the racks in front of her and inspects it.	
627	43	ECU	The hands of 604, now recognisable as Svilova's, note a number on a slip of paper.	
628	109	MCU	A smiling woman wearing a headscarf controls a machine-wound drum of fine-gauge cable.	
629	50	MCU	Svilova, seen as in 626 in front of the racks of film, places a slip of paper into a reel of film and leans forwards towards the racks.	
630	180	MCU	The camera pans back and forth five times between the woman of 628 and a woman opposite her engaged in the same work, then tilts down to the cable-drum and the belts driving it.	

Figure 1

	Shot	576	577	578	579	580	581	582	583	584	585	586	587	588	589	590	591	592	593	594	595	596	597	598	599
Turbanned Woman	46	27																							
Make-up		51		42		41		40																	
Working Woman			169		92		73																		
Shampooing									38		81		77												
Washing										81		80		78											
Shaving																									
Razor- Stropping																	54								
Axe-honing																		76							
Cranking Camera																			30						
Camera Filming Itself																									
Shoeshining																									106
																									107

The ensuing analysis aims to illustrate the sequential operation and interaction of features outlined in the foregoing synchronic analysis. It therefore takes account of the interaction of the film's work on cinematic forms with its work on the contemporary social formation. It focusses particularly on the way in which the film's dominant structural principle, the ceaseless displacement of one 'system' by the next, serves the development of conceptual argument. The diagrams heading the discussion of each segment show the patterning of different actions within each. Numbers within the diagrams give shot-length in frames.

Segment 1

(*see Figure 1, opposite*)

The first segment's alternating montage serves, first, to separate out different diegetic spaces and second, to set up an antithesis between worked for and worker. The first pattern is broken only by the razor of 592, which can be read as belonging to the same diegetic space as the man of 591 and 593. Once established with 579-80, the second is carried through consistently to the end of the segment, the length of 580 serving as an emphatic assertion of the proletariat after four successive shots of the new bourgeoisie. The regularity of this pattern of class-based antithesis set in different diegetic spaces is reinforced by the allocation of three shots to each of the figures involved: the woman having her eyes made up/the woman involved in construction, the woman having her hair shampooed/the woman washing curtains (stills 13-14 show the last two shots (589 and 590) of this regular patterning). The pattern is established to be undermined (stills 15-23 of shots 591-99 illustrate this development). For 591-3 (stills 15-17) could be read as occupying the same diegetic space, while the worked for/worker antithesis is maintained. The shot of the razor being stropped (still 16) not only disrupts the diegetic separation pattern, it is also the segment's first shot to foreground an object to such an extent. In both respects, it functions as a kind of transition marker preparatory to the extraordinary shot of an axe being honed (still 18). This shot not only disrupts the temporary respite of diegetic coherence; more, it is a remarkable invocation of the paradigmatic at the level of the signified. The film's montage poses the question directly: either one serves the new bourgeoisie (the razor), or one works to eliminate them (the axe followed by the exposed neck of the woman luxuriating in the sensation of having her hair blow-dried: still 19). The work proposed here is in the first place ideological, this being the point of using the axe shot as a transition marker for the introduction of the camera two shots later: the camera, via editing, as ideological weapon against the

- 48 ruling class. Rhymed with the circular movement of the blow-drier, the hand cranking the camera (still 20) stands as the segment's first phasing-in of the Film Construction Process. As throughout the film, filming is designated as labour, here assimilated to it through the ongoing worked for/worker antithesis. After the final appearance of the woman having her hair blow-dried (still 21), the camera is seen filming itself in a mirror headed 'Specialist Shoeshiner from Paris' (still 22). The joke linking this with the subsequent shot of shoeshining (still 23) is the transition marker for the end of the segment.

Segment 2

Figure 2

	Shot									
	600	601	602	603	604	605	606	607	608	609
Haircutting		67			51					
Haircutting and Manicuring				51						
Manicuring					79		55			54
Cutting and Splicing						76		38	25	42

This segment phases out the worked for/worker antithesis for a parallelism through alternating montage. It therefore opens with a modified form of the dual antithesis structuring the previous segment. For while 600 and 602 centre on the person worked for and 601 and 603 show those working – first both hairdresser and manicurist, and then just the manicurist – these four shots represent a coherent diegetic space. 601 thus serves as a delayed master shot answering the questions raised by the play with framing in 600: What is happening here? Who is having this done for him/her? Worked for and worker in these shots are therefore separated only by framing within a coherent diegetic space. 603 introduces a double shift: from antithesis to parallelism of activities, and from diegetic coherence to the separation of diegetic spaces. The alternation established in 603-9 between the manicurist and the editor assimilates editing to other labour processes. But a significant divergence between their activities emerges in the course of the segment. Both start from cutting (fingernail/filmstrip). Whereas the manicurist is doing the same at the end of the segment, however, the editor has advanced from cutting to splicing film. Editing, then, can transform and create from its raw material; manicuring cannot. The point is given ironic emphasis in the shot (607) breaking the alternation pattern – and also serving as transition marker for the end of the segment – which highlights the editor's fingernail as she dips the brush into the editing cement.

Figure 3

	Shot
	610 611 612 613 614
Seamstress	28 55 76
Her Face	20 19

This is a segment of extraordinary diegetic coherence for the film, albeit lasting only five shots. It even opens with a master shot of the woman glumly and clumsily sewing by hand, probably at home, and follows eyeline match conventions in the cuts between close-ups of her face and medium close-ups of her figure. This switching between face and figure in a way maintains the film's dominant principle of montage alternation. The segment picks up the film's many preceding shots of bobbins being reeled, thus suggesting the interconnectedness of different forms of work. Its transition marker is barely noticeable, if it qualifies as such anyway: the relative brevity of 613 contrasted with the increasing lengths of 610, 612 and 614.

Segment 4

Figure 4

	Shot
	615 616 617
Camera Lens	27 21
Cranking Camera	6

The phasing-in of *énonciation* in the form of shots of the camera in this segment clearly breaks any simple involvement the spectator may have had with the previous segment, thus initiating consideration of a problematic investigated through the six segments. The *ostranenie* of 615 (still 24) and 617 depends on such distortions of visual perception that it is difficult to work out how the shots could have been constructed. The convex lens reflects the Man with the Camera filming it, hence the crab-like arms which are presumably cranking the filming camera. But this is first turned through 90°, and second superimposed(?) within a shot of a camera which is already filming itself in a mirror, hence the reversal of its writing which can be seen to read correctly elsewhere in the film. The six-frame shot of the cranking of the camera is the segment's transition marker. This transitional segment sharpens the contrast between the preceding and subsequent segments showing different forms of sewing, stressing both as choices within a paradigm.

50 Segment 5

Figure 5

	Shot					
	618	619	620	621	622	623
Seamstress		27			39	
Material			40	28		47
Sewing Machine						
Fly-wheel				29		

In this segment the sewing is done by machine in a factory. The machinist's smile obviously contrasts with the expression of the woman sewing by hand, and the speed of her work with the slowness of that of the woman in Segment 3. Montage alternation is similarly maintained throughout this segment in the interweaving of shots of the material on which the seamstress is working with shots of her and of the sewing-machine flywheel. Again, the diegetic coherence of the segment enables the spectator to concentrate on the kind of work which it shows, to the extent even that there seems to be no transition marker for the next segment. This segment finds its memory in earlier shots in the film of the model sewing-machines on display in shop windows for the new bourgeoisie. This memory combines with that of the sewing by hand in Segment 3 and thus advances the argument from the antithesis of worked for/worker of Segment 1. Thus far, the group of segments under discussion develop the terms of the productivity/non-productivity and lack/excess paradigms outlined in Part II B.

Segment 6

Figure 6

	Shot						
	624	625	626	627	628	629	630
Identifying Rushes	55		88	43		50	
Machine Winding		84			109		180

At this point the argument is further developed by the introduction of the opposition labour-intensive/capital-intensive and the paradigm education/mystification. Segment 6 returns to the diegetic separation of activities last seen in Segment 2. This formal parallelism establishes an implicit equation between the servicing done in the first and the factory work done in this segment. Here the activities shown are the identification of film rushes and factory work involving winding by machine. It is the motion of winding or turning which links the two series: winding on the viewing table of 624 rhymed with controlling the sewing-machine flywheel of 625 and winding the fine-gauge cable of 628 and 630. The critical

51

difference between the two series lies in the difference necessary to, and in this film, also *generated by* editing and, conversely, the non-reflective nature of factory work in the given social formation. When the machinist stops the sewing-machine flywheel, it is only to direct the material on the correct course. When Svilova stops the filmstrip, it is to identify it preparatory to reworking the filmed material, to thinking through its final organisation. This theoretical reconstruction is what fills the gap between the two aspects of editing – cutting and splicing – shown in Segment 2. The divergence between editing and the other activities in this segment is such that the similarities between the two all but disappear after the first two shots. While the factory workers continue machine-winding through the segment, the editor takes a reel, numbers it – this action pointedly breaking the regularity of the alternation pattern – and thus identifies it. Editing, itself predicated on filming – another reason for the inclusion of the filming process in Segment 4 – is far more capable of transforming material than is sewing. This segment thus extends the argument initiated by the razor/axe opposition in Segment 1. Not only does its sequence of shots *enact* the capacities of editing to diverge from the phenomenal world it more often serves merely to reflect, it also exposes the very processes which such reflection occludes. Moreover, the establishment of the film's capacity, through editing, to transform the appearance of the world casts further doubt – already suggested in Segment 4 – on the diegetically coherent representations of the world adopted in Segments 3 and 5. In terms of *Man with a Movie Camera*, these two segments have exceptional diegetic coherence, focussing considerable attention on their signifieds. However, the contextualisation of these two segments by Segments 4 and 6 catalyses criticism of their apparent celebration of the benefits of factory work within the given social formation. This criticism is amplified in the two ways noted in Part IIB: by knowledge of the state of the textile industry, and through the five subsequent segments' extension of the argument into a critique of relations of production.

Overall, then, the six segments move the spectator from a straightforward perception of class differentials, which presumably in 1929 could have been easily recognised as such, towards an awareness of the determinations of those differentials and hence a possible transformation of them. The final shot's links with the subsequent transitional shot (shot 631) explicitly point to such connections. After elaborately panning back and forth between the two machine workers, the camera tilts down to the revolving cable-drum and to the belt-driven machine (these complex camera movements, the only ones in all six segments, mark the end of this one segment and of the whole series). The cable they wind rhymes with that prominent on the traffic signal in the next shot, and the belts of their machine with that of the policeman controlling the

- 52 signal. Beyond a limited range, their machine-aided work, it seems, benefits not themselves but the social order which directs their daily actions.

IV Conclusions

This article, then, has attempted to indicate why only a Marxist theoretical framework can adequately come to terms with *Man with a Movie Camera*. Through rigorous theoretical reconstruction of its objects, the film thwarts attempts to read into it common-sense ideological constructions, either of forms of cinematic representation or of the contemporary social formation. The method used is an invocation of the paradigmatic. This allows the film both to set up and to explore the ideological nature of social constructions which form a problematic internal and external to cinema's presentations of everyday life, in other words, of social, political and economic consciousness. The paradigms set up are taken to be familiar both to the film-maker and to the spectator. Ideally, the interaction of the spectator, with his/her cultural knowledge, and the film's presentation of that knowledge achieve a synthesis of comprehension enabling the spectator to arrive at a new consciousness of the status of the knowledge. With its focus on this interaction between politicised cinema and the viewer's cultural knowledge, *Man with a Movie Camera* exposes as rampant stupidity – given their knowledge of Russian – the remark of Luda and Jean Schnitzer that 'one of the reasons for *Man with a Movie Camera*'s great success [sic] outside the USSR is precisely the fact that it is the *only* [sic] film which a spectator ignorant of Russian [sic] can see in its complete definitive form'.⁵¹

From the late 1920's Vertov was all too well aware of the ideological recuperations to which his films were subjected.⁵² The film-maker has very limited control, even at the time, over the preponderantly non-cinematic discourses determining the reception of his/her film. Vertov's work in general, and *Man with a Movie Camera* in particular, raise acutely the question of the historical determinants, of the how, when and where of recuperation, problems which in *Screen* have sometimes been elided and sometimes skirted. British recuperations of Soviet cinema – of which a classic symptom is Manvell's capacity to analyse *Battleship Potemkin*'s Odessa Steps segment in terms of Pudovkin's theory of montage⁵³ – are far greater blocks to our understanding of Vertov than is the Soviet editing of his writings. There is material for at least a book on the ideological recuperation of 1920's Soviet cinema in Britain alone. No attempt can be made here to specify adequately the range of determinations involved in the recuperation of Vertov. In Britain, these have resulted in the non-availability of his films apart

from *Man with a Movie Camera*, *Three Songs for Lenin* and the odd number of *Kino-Pravda*, and the existence of only piecemeal translations of his writings into English.⁵⁴ As will be seen below, there are correspondingly few constructive writings on Vertov. It is to be hoped that this dismal situation will soon be remedied.

The 1972 *Cinéthique* 15-16 article, ‘“Ne Copiez pas sur les Yeux”, Disait Vertov’, includes a very useful reading of various Russian and French recuperations of Vertov’s work. Both of the principal recent appropriations of Vertov’s work uproot it from all historical determinations. The first of these is conducted in the name of realist Truth: Sadoul, for instance, whose *Dziga Vertov*⁵⁵ has a chapter entitled ‘From Dziga Vertov to Jean Rouch (*Cinéma-Vérité* and *Kino-Eye*)’. The second is in the name of an avant-garde formalism: for instance, Vogel’s hailing of *Man with a Movie Camera* as ‘antedating the structuralist [sic] films of our day by almost half a century’.⁵⁶

What characterises all the misreadings of *Man with a Movie Camera* is their inability to read the film in toto, unless covering it with such meaningless blankets as Kracauer’s ‘lyric documentary’.⁵⁷ The few critical attempts at the film which actually examine it carefully tend to fall apart after considering some twenty shots or so, because they fail in any way to come to terms with the film’s overriding structural principle, the ceaseless displacement of one ‘system’ by the next. Michelson’s essay on the film,⁵⁸ which gets closer to it than most, epitomises the difficulties in which idealist approaches to the film are caught. Her phenomenological formalism limits her account of the film to segments where a coherent diegesis can be read in: for instance, the unmatched shot/reverse-shots of the athletics segments, or the shot of the Bolshoi which is *then* ‘collapsed’ by means of formal devices. Pervading critical attempts at the film are straightforward errors testifying to its incompatibility with the structures and processes of memory: Barnouw’s placing of the self-demonstrating camera segment as the film’s finale, to cite just one example.⁵⁹ Some critics apparently feel safer avoiding the embarrassment of confronting the film at all: Robinson’s *World Cinema: A Short History* does not even mention it, and Barsam’s *Non-Fiction Film: A Short History* devotes five words to the film – its title – while lavishing several pages on both *Berlin* and *Rien que les Heures*. Throughout *Man with a Movie Camera*’s critical history, the terms of its dismissal have remained remarkably consistent, indices both of the radical nature of the film’s disarticulation of dominant assumptions in cinema and of the continuing perpetuation of those assumptions. Such assumptions, then as now, centre on homogeneity. Thus it is an ideology of coherence which recurs continually through most writings on the film and whose assertion often unwittingly includes its own negation, the negation on which it is founded. Thus Abramov, writing in the USSR in 1962, an-

54 nounces the film as 'a serious artistic fiasco' and describes it as 'a heterogeneous kaleidoscope'.⁶⁰ Luda and Jean Schnitzer, whose book was published in France in 1968, complain that 'the bewildered spectator could not follow the infernal cadence of the film'.⁶¹ Grierson's 1931 remarks typify the problems of the British documentarists' technicist appropriation of Soviet cinema. He reviles *Man with a Movie Camera* as 'not a film at all: it is a snapshot album. There is no story, no dramatic structure and no special revelation about the Moscow [sic] it has chosen for a subject'.⁶² In 1929, *Close-Up* complains à la Bazin of the film's 'wilful interference with the raw material',⁶³ and in 1931 of its being 'never a rounded work'.⁶⁴ On the basis of similar assumptions accusations of camera trickery and formalism become easy excuses for failing to come to terms with the film. Even Leyda, in 1930, laments its 'intricate camera pyrotechnics'.⁶⁵ The 1935 Special Number of *The Studio*, 'Art in the USSR', describes the film similarly: 'a brilliant display of pyrotechnics, this exposition of Kino-Eye said little more than that. Vertov as a documentalist [sic] has still to get to grips with the sociological importance of his material'. A 1971 Soviet article by Kopalin, 'A Life Illuminated by the Revolution, dedicated to Dziga Vertov's 75th Anniversary', criticises the 'exaggerated importance . . . attached to the cine-camera itself – the Kino-Eye', and skirts any mention of *Man with a Movie Camera* by title, though this does emerge in the quote from Vertov used as an epigraph.⁶⁶ Mitry in 1973 illustrates the tenacity of the assumptions of dominant cinematic forms in his criticism of the film for showing 'only the tricks of film', not the 'grammar'.⁶⁷ Indeed, the extent of *Man with a Movie Camera*'s disarticulation of such assumptions has made it less susceptible to recuperation than Vertov's other films. The tangentiality to the film of such critical remarks as are cited above leaves it relatively unscathed and open to more ideologically conscious analyses.

What seems most to trouble such criticism, in fact, seems to be less the film's absence of character and plot elements than its simultaneous dismantling of diegetic coherence and retention of diegetic elements, its refusal simply to accept or simply to reject diegesis. If this unclassifiable hybrid has thwarted film critics, it also forces a rethinking of work in film theory which normatises diegesis. One obvious instance is Metz's early 'Grande Syntagmatique'. Focussing exclusively on the *énoncé* and disavowing *énonciation*, it normatises the diegesis of film as the basis for any cinematic language system (*langue*). Any shot or segment outside a film's diegesis is thus consigned to the dustbin of the non-diegetic insert. Mechanistic applications of Jakobson's metaphor/metonymy distinction to diegesis create similar problems. Through its theoretical practice *Man with a Movie Camera* rids metaphor and metonymy of their (mis)application to diegesis and returns them to their proper linguistic foundations, paradigm and syntagma.

Man with a Movie Camera's (unparalleled?) reworking of diegetic space and time is more extensive than that undertaken by either his contemporary Eisenstein or by Godard, who adopted the Dziga Vertov Group banner for films he made with Gorin and Richard in 1969-71. Both in his theoretical writings and in his films of the 1920s, Eisenstein, conceiving signifiers primarily as a means of expression and montage primarily as a collision of signifieds, tends to assume a dominant diegesis. Hence the appearance of his 'intellectual montage' segments, for instance the 'gods' segment and the Kerensky/titles montage of *October*, as excursions from the film. His unrealised *Capital* project indicates a move away from this: 'The "ancient" cinema was shooting *one event from many points of view*. The new one assembles *one point of view* from many events.'⁶⁸ However, this new direction was never followed through. Godard's 1968-71 films experiment extensively with multiple diegesis, in both fictional and documentary modes. While his work on the latter modes does not rethink the notion of diegesis as thoroughly as does *Man with a Movie Camera*, this is because of his endeavours to set up a dialectical relationship between sound and image. Notably in *Numéro Deux*, made with Mieville, Godard does begin to effect a political transformation of the spectator's relations to meaning. In distinction from *Man with a Movie Camera*, of course, this is in a fictional mode. It remains, however, that neither Eisenstein nor, as yet, Godard has shown the theoretical rigour informing *Man with a Movie Camera*'s theoretical reconstruction of its objects and the setting of the two in parallel.

One of the problems which Eisenstein's 'intellectual montage' left unresolved was that of the verbal cueing on which it depends in his films. If any of Eisenstein's montage categories applies to *Man with a Movie Camera*, it is 'intellectual montage'. The film's liberation from the determinations of diegetic coherence in particular allows this to be activated throughout. *Man with a Movie Camera* stands as one of the very few feature-length silent films with no titles, the absolute refusal of which Vertov repeatedly stresses.⁶⁹ Its achievement is all the more remarkable for its restriction to only one – albeit the most fundamental – of Metz's five material categories of the signifier.⁷⁰ But this concentration is understandable given Vertov's description of the film as 'aiming to fill a breach in the sector of cinematic language'.⁷¹ It is vital to think thoroughly through the modes of construction of the moving photographic image alone in cinema, an investigation probably pushed further by *Man with a Movie Camera* than by any other single film. It is therefore wrong to assume, as does MacCabe, that heterogenisation of the cinema can be attained only, or even primarily, through counterposition of non-diegetically motivated graphic material to 'the plenitude of the image'.⁷² To assign an immutable function to any of Metz's five material cate-

56 gories of the signifier is to lapse into the God-given. Moreover, it should be further noted that Metz's list makes no allowance for intra-diegetic writing, which in *Man with a Movie Camera* does serve to heterogenise the image.

Man with a Movie Camera points a route out of the impasse which Barthes locates for avant-garde art and which enables him to define it as 'that stubborn language which is going to be recuperated'.⁷³ The film disproves Barthes's notion that avant-garde artistic practices, aimed at the 'destruction of discourse', are inevitably negative operations doomed to the interminable reassertion of the discourses they counter through simple opposition to them. *Man with a Movie Camera* demonstrates to the contrary that the 'destruction of discourse' can be a dialectical operation. The complete inadequacy of idealist attempts to appropriate the film is evident from the above quotations (Rouch himself admits the film to be one 'which we have not yet understood').⁷⁴ As long as avant-garde artistic practices limit themselves to work on the signifier alone, they fall into the traps laid by and inherent to the structures of dominant discourses. Through its invocation of the paradigmatic, *Man with a Movie Camera* dialecticises these opposite terms and thereby opens up a terrain beyond that directly determined by dominant discourses.

Beyond those already considered, *Man with a Movie Camera* raises many further questions for film theory and film-making: how films can most effectively contribute to ideological struggle, what forms of documentary are now possible in the light of the film's theoretical reconstruction of its objects of 1929, what sound can contribute over and above the image, how a film can most effectively build on the cultural knowledge of the general or of the more specifically defined audience in order to increase (raise) political consciousness and, finally, how such a distinction of audiences, if necessary, can be achieved.

Credits

Man with a Movie Camera (Chelovek s Kinoapparatom): USSR 1929
1830 metres

Production — VUFKU. Released January 8, 1929. Scenario and direction — Dziga Vertov (Denis Arkadevich Kaufman). Editing — Elizaveta Svilova. Photography — Mikhail Kaufman.

Notes

1. M Enzensberger: 'Dziga Vertov', *Screen* v 13 n 4, Winter 1972-3.
2. Dziga Vertov: *Articles, Journaux, Projets*, Union Générale d'Editions 1972, pp 97-8.
3. Ibid, pp 101, 105, 93-4, 93.
4. Vertov, op cit, p 107.

5. Ibid, pp 69, 197, 83. 6. Ibid, pp 79-80. 7. Ibid, p 59. 57
8. Vertov: 'Film Directors, A Revolution', *Cinema* 9, 1971, p 27, reprinted *Screen* v 12 n 4, Winter 1971-2, p 56; Vertov: *Articles, Journaux, Projets*, pp 95, 52, 105, 51.
9. Cf "Ne Copiez pas sur les Yeux", Disait Vertov', *Cinéthique* 15-16, 1972, pp 63-4.
10. In Eisenstein, *Film Form*, Meridian 1957, pp 55-63, 72-83.
11. Vertov: op cit, p 142. 12. Eisenstein: op cit, p 43.
13. Marx: *Grundrisse*, Penguin 1974, p 105. 14. Ibid, p 101.
15. Ibid.
16. Nove: *An Economic History of the USSR*, Penguin 1976, p 136.
17. *Articles, Journaux, Projets* is a complete translation of the 1966 Russian edition of Vertov's writings.
18. Carynyk (ed): *Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Film-maker*, MIT Press 1973.
19. Translated in *October* 2, Summer 1976.
20. Kozintsev: 'La Fin des Années Vingt', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 230, July 1971, p 5; Eisenstein: op cit, p 26.
21. Vertov: op cit, pp 137-8; Fevralski: 'Dziga Vertov et les Pravdisty', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 229, May 1971, pp 28-9.
22. Vertov: op cit, pp 83-5; Fevralski: op cit, pp 28-9.
23. Vertov: op cit, p 118.
24. Fevralski: op cit, pp 28 and 31-3. Vertov: op cit, pp 234-6, 286, 294.
25. Vertov: op cit, p 51.
26. Barthes: 'L'Ancienne Rhétorique', *Communications* 16, 1970, p 213.
27. Vertov: op cit, p 119. 28. Ibid, p 209.
29. Ibid, p 61.
30. Ibid, pp 34, 102.
31. Lenin: *On Literature and Art*, Progress Publishers 1970, p 17; cf Vertov: op cit, p 240.
32. Heath: 'Narrative Space', *Screen* v 17 n 3, Autumn 1976, p 107.
33. Quoted Abramov: *Dziga Vertov*, Premier Plan 1965, p 57.
34. Ibid, p 58.
35. Cf Wollen: "Ontology" and "Materialism" in Film', *Screen* v 17 n 1, Spring 1976, pp 14, 22.
36. Preface to Vertov: *Articles*, cit, p 11.
37. Vertov: op cit, p 129. 38. Ibid, p 119.
39. Lacan: *Écrits*, Seuil 1966, pp 502-3. Cf especially p 502: 'It is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but none of the elements of the chain *consists* in the meaning of which it is capable at that particular moment.'
40. Vertov: op cit, p 283. 41. Quoted Abramov: op cit, p 58.
42. Vertov: op cit, pp 29-30, 31-2.
43. Michelson, 'The Man with the Movie Camera: from Magician to Epistemologist', *Artforum* v X n 7, March 1972, p 69.
44. The ambulance of shots 534-68, for instance, belongs to the Kiev brigade, and the Railway Workers' Club of shot 1219 is in Odessa, while the litter bin of shot 80 and the marriage and divorce certificates of shots 390 and 402, for example, are inscribed in Ukrainian.
45. Vertov: op cit, p 61.
46. Contrast Grierson on *Drifters'* rattling good yarn of Man's epic struggle against the elements: 'If you can tell me a story with a better crescendo. . . Men at their labour are the salt of the earth.' Forsyth Hardy (ed): *Grierson on Documentary*, Faber 1966, p 135.
47. Metz: *Essais sur la Signification au Cinéma*, Klincksieck 1968, pp 121-34, summarised in Daniel: 'Metz's "Grande Syntagmatique": A Summary and Critique', *Film Form* 1, Spring 1976.

- 58 48. Marx: op cit, p 100. 49. Vertov: op cit, p 384.
 50. Ibid, p 73.
 51. Luda and Jean Schnitzer: *Dziga Vertov, 1896-1954*, Anthologie du Cinéma 1968, p 187.
 52. Cf Vertov: op cit, pp 117-8, 144-5, 145-50.
 53. R Manvell: *Film*, Penguin 1944, p 48.
 54. Those available are listed in Lawder (ed): *Essential Cinema*, New York University Press 1976. Many are, in the most generous terms, unscholarly, as witness the unacknowledged excision of Vertov's quotes from Lenin, cited in Part II above, from *Film Culture* 25, reprinted in Sitney: *Film Culture Anthology*, Secker and Warburg 1973 and in Geduld: *Film Makers on Film Making*, Penguin 1970. The most useful single item of Vertov's writing available in English is his 1923 'Film Directors, A Revolution', *Cinema* 9, 1971, reprinted in *Screen* v 12 n 4, Winter 1971-2.
 55. Editions Champ Libre 1971.
 56. Vogel: *Film as a Subversive Art*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1974, p 43.
 57. Kracauer: *From Caligari to Hitler*, Princeton University Press 1947, p 185.
 58. Cit, note 43.
 59. Barnouw: *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, OUP 1974, p 63.
 60. Abramov: *Dziga Vertov*, Premier Plan 1965, pp 57, 59.
 61. L and J Schnitzer: op cit, p 186. 62. Grierson: op cit, p 127.
 63. Lenauer: 'Vertov, His Work and The Future', *Close-Up*, December 1929, p 467.
 64. Quoted Leyda: *Kino*, Allen and Unwin 1973, p 251.
 65. Leyda: op cit, p 251. 66. *Soviet Film* 1971, n 1, January 1971.
 67. Mity: *Histoire du Cinéma Muet III 1923-1930*, Editions Universitaires 1973, p 256.
 68. Eisenstein: 'Notes for a Film of Capital', p 18.
 69. Vertov: op cit, pp 118, 379.
 70. Metz: *Langage et Cinéma*, Larousse 1971, p 180.
 71. Vertov: op cit, p 148.
 72. MacCabe: 'The Politics of Separation', *Screen* v 16 n 4, Winter 1975-6, p 55.
 73. Barthes: *Le Plaisir du Texte*, Seuil 1973, p 87.
 74. Rouch: 'Cinq Regards sur Vertov', in Sadoul, op cit, p 12.

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A Lecture on Realism*

Raymond Williams

The Big Flame is a play written by Jim Allen, produced by Tony Garnett and directed by Ken Loach for BBC television. I want to discuss it in relation to our understanding of realism. It should be clear at the outset that except in the local vocabulary of particular schools, realism is a highly variable and inherently complex term. In fact, as a term, it only exists in critical vocabulary from the mid-nineteenth century, yet it is clear that methods to which the term refers are very much older. Let me make just one obvious general distinction between conceiving realism in terms of a particular artistic method and conceiving realism in terms of a particular attitude towards what is called 'reality'. Now if, taking the first definition, we concentrate on method, we put ourselves at once in a position in which the method can be seen as timeless: in which it is, so to say, a permanent possibility of choice for any particular artist. Certain things can be learned from this kind of emphasis, but once we become aware of the historical variations within this method, we find ourselves evidently dissatisfied with the abstraction of a method which overrides its relations with other methods within a work or with other aims and intentions.

Let me give one or two examples of this. Realism would be an obvious term for that well-known episode within the medieval play known as the Play of the Townley Shepherds, which is basically a play of the nativity and the annunciation of the birth of

* The text which follows is transcribed from a version of a lecture first given by Raymond Williams at the SEFT/*Screen* weekend school on Realism held at the London International Film School on October 8-10, 1976. We are grateful to the speaker for making available the tape from which the text is transcribed. Transcription by Annéte Kuhn.

- 62 Christ to the shepherds, and in that sense a characteristic religious form of medieval drama indeed largely written in that way. The inserted episode to which I am referring is that in which, before the annunciation, the shepherds, recognisably shepherds of the district in which the play was written and played – that is to say, offering themselves for recognition in these terms – discuss the problems of their own life as shepherds and represent themselves in that very specific situation. Then comes the annunciation. Now, you can look at this either way: you can say that the scene is inserted because it is of interest to the people who know of that life or are sharing that life and who recognise this as the life of shepherds in their own district, in which case this definition can be assimilated to a common later definition of realism; or you can look at it in quite another way and say that the establishment of the locality, the local realism, of these Yorkshire shepherds is a condition of that work as a whole, in that the annunciation, presumed to have happened to shepherds in Palestine, is a universal annunciation, and the condition of the local realism is a condition for the universality of the religious event. In other words, you can only finally determine the function of that realism, and thence the critical significance of a description of it as that, when you have analysed not only the local method but the relation of that method to other methods and other intentions within the work.

Or, again, consider those scenes which are often inserted in English renaissance tragedies, usually with a conscious social movement from the major personages of the drama, personages of rank, to persons of a different social order who speak in different ways, and who again, interestingly, are often recognisably contemporary English characters, even within an action which can be that of an Italian court, or a Roman forum, or of some much earlier period. The intention at these points is not the same as that within the Townley shepherds play, where the locality-with-universality is a very specific convention. On the other hand, in terms of method, we have to describe certain scenes as realistic: the written speech moves much closer towards the imitation of everyday ordinary life: all these are later seen as conditions of realism. Yet the scene inserted within this very different kind of play can be described as realism with any accuracy only if the relation to the intentions of the larger work is made. Here we have not the local/universal specificity of the religious drama, but a problem of interrelation and extending action in which the contrast between the modes of action and the modes of speech of the principal characters and these subsidiary characters is itself a function of the definition of the dramatic action as a whole. The contrast between this version of realism as method and the alternative version of realism as fundamental attitude can, I think, only be appreciated historically when, looking through the development of dramatic forms, we come to the unmistakable qualitative

difference which occurs when the realistic method, often very similar to that used in these earlier particular scenes, is extended to the construction of a whole form, and when the play as a whole is conceived as not only using these methods but as embodying entirely different intentions. If we are to discuss those later intentions, there is a certain obvious loss if we set intention aside and discuss only method, or think that we can reduce the question of intention to the question of method.

The crucial development of realism as a whole form occurs in the drama in the eighteenth century, although there are precedents. There is a very interesting case, for example, in restoration prose comedy, which happened to have an unusually integrated relationship between plays, actors and audience within the quite extraordinarily class-limited nature of the restoration patent theatres. The life of a small class around the court is written about by dramatists who belong to that life, and plays for audiences almost exclusively of that life, and as a whole form, these are perhaps the first realist plays – according to one definition – in English. There is a concentration on contemporary everyday reality within the terms of that class. The modes of speech have moved towards the imitation of conversation with a much greater consistency than in any earlier drama. Moreover, this is accompanied by certain changes, themselves not wholly determined by artistic intention: substitution of actresses for boy actors in the playing of female parts is only one obvious example. And yet it is significant how often the title of realism is refused to that kind of comedy of manners, as it is now usually classified, because, although the method and the intention is in these broad terms realist, the later definition of realism as a whole form was concerned with different, and indeed consciously opposed, attitudes towards reality – it being assumed that the limited interests and the limited habits of this class, which found its embodiment in that particular dramatic form, are not in the full sense an engagement with contemporary reality.

It is indeed when we come on to this later drama, specifically the bourgeois drama of the eighteenth century, that we come to realism as a whole form, and that we need to identify certain defining characteristics. First there is a conscious movement towards social extension. There is a crucial argument in the early period of bourgeois tragedy about the need to extend the actions of tragedy from persons of rank, to whom by convention and precept tragedy had hitherto largely been confined, to – as it was put – ‘your equals, our equals’. This movement of social extension – ‘let not your equals move your pity less’ – is a key factor in what we can now identify as a realist intention. Then, second, there is a movement towards the siting of actions in the present, to making action contemporary. It is remarkable that in most preceding drama it seemed almost a constituent of dramatic form

64 that it was set either in the historical or in a legendary past, and the emphasis on the actions of the contemporary world is the second defining feature of this new bourgeois realism. And the third, which is perhaps in the end the most important, is that there is an emphasis on secular action, in the quite precise sense that elements of a metaphysical or a religious order directly or indirectly frame, or in the stronger cases determine, the human actions within the earlier plays. This dimension is dropped, and in its place a human action is played through in specifically human terms – exclusively human terms. This was seen as a loss of significance, as a narrowing of drama. It is often condemned as a sentimentalisation of the tragic action, and indeed in local terms this was often true. But it is impossible to overlook the connection between this conscious secularisation and the development of attitudes which we must associate with realism in a much wider sense than that of dramatic method, that is to say with the development of rationalism, of the scientific attitude, of historical attitudes towards society.

At the same time, within a specific situation, these general realistic intentions were limited by specific ideological features. Lello's play *The London Merchant* is an important example of this type. And yet, it is held within a particular local structure which has to do with the ideology of a particular class and not with these more general intentions; or rather these general intentions are mediated through the specific ideology. It is a story of the honest, hardworking, obedient apprentice who is contrasted with the apprentice who is seeking his own fortune and his own pleasure in his own way. This leads him into theft and murder, while the good apprentice marries his master's daughter and succeeds. The good apprentice and the daughter watch the execution of the bad apprentice and his mistress, and invite the audience consciously to mark their fate and learn how to avoid it. It is not surprising that this play was subsequently subsidised for annual performance to apprentices by a London guild of merchants, and that this went on for more than a century. And we can see that in a sense, just because of the ideological content, the realistic intention is obliquely confirmed. It is assumed that this picture of what happens is sufficiently clear and convincing in the terms of realism to be available as a lesson, a moral lesson, to people finding themselves in the same situation: they can directly apply the actions of the drama to their own lives.

The development of realism in the drama from these early bourgeois plays towards the important high naturalism of the late nineteenth century is slow and complex, and yet by the time, for example, that we come to Ibsen in the late nineteenth century, it

is clear that what has developed from these three emphases is a new major form. The three emphases which are then often consciously described as realism are the secular, the contemporary and the socially extended. In a sense, those definitions have become so widespread, though never of course exclusive, that they have come to include within their overall definitions many local variations of method.

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There is a complication here in that in the late nineteenth century there was an attempt to distinguish realism from naturalism, and it is worth considering this distinction for a moment. In fact, naturalism, even more clearly than realism, is not primarily defined as a dramatic or more general artistic method. Naturalism is originally the conscious opposition to supernaturalism and to metaphysical accounts of human actions, with an attempt to describe human actions in exclusively human terms with a more precise local emphasis. The relation to science, indeed consciously to natural history, the method of exhaustive analytic description of contemporary reality, and the terms naturalism and realism which have those philosophical connections, are for a time interchangeable, even complicated by the fact that in a famous definition Strindberg called naturalism the method which sought to go below the surface and discover essential movements and conflicts, while realism, he said, was that which reproduced everything, even the speck of dust on the lens of the camera. As I suppose we all now know, the eventual conventional distinction was the same but with the terms the other way round. Naturalism was seen as that which merely reproduced the flat external appearance of reality with a certain static quality, whereas realism – in the Marxist tradition, for example – was that method and that intention which went below this surface to the essential historical movements, to the dynamic reality. And within the terms of that distinction it is now a commonplace – it seems to be a picture that could be set up in type for every interview with a contemporary director or dramatist – that naturalism has been abandoned, naturalism in the sense of the reproduction of the appearance of everyday reality. It remains remarkable in view of all these declarations that the great majority of contemporary drama is of course the reproduction of everyday reality in precisely those terms, with really surprisingly small local variations. And realism, although permitted a wider extent because of the reference to dynamic movement, has tended to be swept up in this abstract and ultimately meaningless rejection – with various complications about psychological realism, neo-realism, and so on.

It is clear even from these few examples that we have to be especially careful about definitions which we have seen to be historically variable, and especially about definitions which abstract the method from an intention in ways that are finally insupportable in any substantial analysis. The best example I can give of

66 this problem of the relation between a technical and a general definition is the case of the room on the stage in nineteenth-century drama. It is undoubtedly a quite specific historical development: the reproduction of the stage as *room*, or a room on the stage, which occurs during the nineteenth century in a wide area of the European theatre. Before that, even where rooms had been in question, the stage was still primarily a playing space. And of course given the nature of earlier actions, the room – the specifically domestic unit – was much less often used than the more public places of street, palace, forum, court. Now there is a familiar kind of technologically determinist history which relates the development of the room on the stage to developments in theatrical technology: the introduction of gas lighting, the improvement of stage carpentry, and so on. But it is in fact ludicrous to suppose that if people before the nineteenth century had wanted to create rooms on stages in the way that they were created in the late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century theatre they would have been technically unable to do so. The truth is that the production of the room on the stage was a particular reading both of the natural centre of dramatic action in terms of social extension and the emphasis on the contemporary; it was also as it happens in its later development a specific naturalist reading in the full sense of the indissoluble relation between character and environment, in which the room was a character because it was a specific environment created by and radically affecting, radically displaying, the nature of the characters who lived in it.

The true history is more complex than either a history in terms of increasing technical capacity, or a history in terms of this scientific version of a relation between character and environment. In fact, if you look at when the first 'box sets' with reproduced rooms were put on the stage in England (the English and French theatres moving at about the same rate in this respect), you will find that the rooms are there not to give any impression of recognition or demonstration of environment, but simply to display a certain kind of luxury. They are 'society' plays of a consciously displayed kind – of a fashionable kind, as we would now say – and most of the technology of the box set and the subsequent adaptation of theatres to the fully-framed box set, which was not complete until the 1870s, was more conditioned by this 'furnishing display' than by either of the other intentions. But there is a radical development, not so much in English drama as in Scandinavian, German, Russian, and then extending through Europe, of the room as the centre of the reality of human action: the private domestic room, which is of course entirely consonant with a particular reading of the place of human action – this is the life of the bourgeois family, where the important things occur in that kind of family room. All I mean is that if we are analysing a form of that kind it is not enough to note the method and relate it to some

abstract concept of realism, or to assume that the reproduction of a room has some constant implication in overall dramatic intention.

This point is also relevant to the subsequent variable uses of film. It is clear that film could in certain ways more actively develop the reproduction of room, of mobility from room to room, of a variety of scenes conceived in those simple terms, that it could again move out of doors into the street, into the public places which on the whole the theatrical drama had left behind. At the same time, inherent in the fact of the camera was the possibility of the use of the image for quite different purposes. And since most uses of films were defined in terms of the received dramatic tradition, you find the same variation of message and intentions and variable combinations of methods and intentions, and the same variability – not to say confusion – of terms. It is in this sense that one can perhaps best approach the problem of definition of *The Big Flame* with a consciousness of inherent variation, and ask certain questions about it.

It might be worth asking first: how would the makers of *The Big Flame* themselves describe their work? Would they say that it was showing real life in the Liverpool Docks? They might. But I think that that is not all that they would say. One can see certain obvious continuities with the earlier history that I have described. In one sense, the movement to which this particular work belongs can be sited historically as a further phase of that social extension which defined the first period of bourgeois drama. When the bourgeois tragedians talked of moving out to a concern with 'your equals, their equals', they were moving towards their own class. Still there was very little extension towards a class beyond them. And there is a perfectly accurate way of reading the subsequent history of this kind of dramatic form in terms of its further social extension, one of the three key features of the definition of the bourgeois dramatic form. This is a conscious extension of dramatic material to areas of life which had been evidently excluded even from majority drama. And television was often conceived in this way as the site for a particular dramatic extension, since it had already a fully socially extended audience. It was seen as the proper site, in conscious opposition to the theatre with its persistent minority audience in social terms and its much more limited class audience, of the alternative which allowed a popular audience and the extension to themes of a much more fully extended drama, that of the drama of working-class life, bringing the working class to the centre of dramatic action.

There are still not enough examples of this to indicate that the movement is complete. In the theatre it is a very late movement: I don't know that it happens before, say, Hauptmann's *The Weavers* in 1892, which is a classic in the naturalist theatre, and which is accompanied by certain conscious political intentions. It is hardly

- 68 possible to conceive of an extension of this kind without a certain conscious political viewpoint in the at first relatively open terms of taking a much wider social life to a much wider audience. And yet you only have to see *The Big Flame* once to realise that something more than simple extension is involved. It is not, as in some cases of the extension to working-class life, the realisation of something that is exotic to the audience. There is a sense in which what was earlier called the drama of 'low life' is a minor intention of bourgeois drama itself, where 'to see how the other half lives', as it was often put, was in itself a particular intention, even a particular form of entertainment. Indeed, one of the questions which has to be asked about *The Big Flame* is whether it is interpreting the particular action within the docks to a wider audience, or whether it is interpreting that class to itself. I think there is evidence of both intentions in the work, and to distinguish between them is important in any complete analysis. On balance, I would say that *The Big Flame* belongs to a kind of realist drama for which a fourth term is necessary in addition to the defining characteristics of the socially extended, the contemporary and the secular; and that is the consciously interpretative in relation to a particular political viewpoint. It has an interesting cross-relation with, for example, the drama of Brecht. It is interesting that Brecht, although in many ways sharing the intentions and the philosophical positions which had underlain realism, had in much of his drama – although certainly retaining and increasing the secular emphasis – moved away from the contemporary. It remains a remarkable fact of his drama that so much of his work is set in the past, and the everyday is subject to that move. The intention of interpreting an event, which Brecht made so intrinsic a part of his dramatic form, distinguishing it from the form which offered an event for mere empathy, seems quite clearly evident in *The Big Flame*, and is probably even consciously derived from something of the influence of Brecht.

The Big Flame sets out to establish the level of existing working-class history and consciousness in a specific workplace. It is looking at the Liverpool Docks at the time of the Devlin report on the docks. It uses features of the developed realist film of this contemplative kind – that which had been developed in the Soviet cinema, for example, and indeed in the Soviet theatre in the early 1920's: the deliberate use of non-actors, of people 'playing themselves'. The locations are (or are in part) the locations of the historical action, the contemporary action, as well as being the locations of the dramatised action, and within these locally defining features a recognisable level of consciousness is established in the conversation of the dockers in the early part of the film. What

then happens is perhaps inconsistent with the narrower definitions of realism in that, having taken the action to that point in this recognisable place, a certain dramatic, but also political, hypothesis is established. What would happen if we went beyond the terms of this particular struggle against existing conditions and existing attempts to define or alter them? What would happen if we moved towards taking power for ourselves? What would happen in specific terms if we moved beyond the strike to the occupation? Thus if we are establishing the character of realism in *The Big Flame*, we have to notice the interesting combination, fusion perhaps, and within this fusion a certain fracture, between the familiar methods of establishing recognition and the alternative method of a hypothesis within that recognition, a hypothesis which is played out in realistic terms, but within a politically imagined possibility. The thing is played through. It is not, incidentally, played through in a Utopian way. What happens in the move to occupation is of course a good deal of success, a good deal of exhilaration, the familiar idea of the release of energy when people take control of their own lives. But within it there are all the time movements towards betrayal, demonstrations of certain kinds of inadequacy of organisation, lack of preparation, the absence of any real warning against the eventual attack by the army; there is the insistence that against the demonstration of the workers' own power the forces of the State will act, and will act both by fraud and by violence, and in the end the particular hypothesis is shown as defeated, but defeated in terms of the local action, and not, while it is retained as a hypothesis, defeated as an idea. There is a very characteristic ending in which, although the particular action has been defeated, the organising committee replaces itself, and in the final scene boys come out from behind the men who are assembling to reconstitute the occupation committee: the boys of the next generation who will take over, and this within a teaching perspective that the working class must understand and learn from its defeats as well as its victories.

It is interesting to look more closely at the specific techniques within this general movement. At first, the techniques are those of the realist film in the simplest sense: the camera is a single eye, there is no possibility of an alternative viewpoint, the viewer has to go along or detach him or herself, he or she has no complex seeing within the action. Indeed, a great deal is taken for granted in knowledge and recognition of the situation. The Devlin report is referred to, but whether it is known or not is in a sense taken for granted. Nothing is done specifically to establish it. What is established is a sense of militancy which is yet an incomplete militancy because it can only react negatively. The key transition from this limited militancy to the next phase of the conscious taking of power is introduced by an alteration of technique. The strong man with a clear view of what can next happen is intro-

- 70 duced, again without much identification, and interestingly without much precise specification of political roots or relation to this action, but he comes in as the voice of a different consciousness, and there is a movement in that part of the film from the rather ragged discussion which is done within naturalist terms to the conscious voice-over presentation of an alternative point of view. The mode of the transition is the introduction of a convention which allows complex-seeing, variable viewpoints when the hypothesis is dramatised in terms of a recognisable action, again largely within naturalist terms. This convention is on the whole not used again, and at the end particularly this absence is significant because the learning from defeat is done by that final scene, insofar as it is done at all, by offering the implication that the class will renew itself in subsequent generations and in self-replacement, rather than by the use of conventions which would show the actual learning of lessons, the attainment of a new consciousness by analysis of what has happened – the convention which Brecht, unevenly but persistently, tried to establish in his kind of drama.

There is one local point here which is rather interesting to analyse. There is a quite effective short scene of a television interviewer who has come to discover what the occupation is about, but to discover this within the terms of his function as a reporter for a particular kind of television service. In fact, we are shown him falsifying in his summing-up what has been said to him, and this is an effective satiric presentation of what many working-class people feel about the function of television interviewers when they come to report events of this kind. As an isolated scene it is effective. Yet it is interesting also because of the general naturalist presentation. If we remember what we have heard outside that scene, we have in fact heard, though at a much more dispersed level than would give any warrant to the interviewer's summary, that kind of feeling: that the thing is too much effort, that people would like to get back to work. It is as if that scene was conceived as a satiric presentation in its own right. This use of yet another convention dependent on our awareness of the modes of television interviewing and its insertion into the dominant convention of the rest of the film creates a certain unresolved tension, even a contradiction.

Or take another problem of point of view, one which requires a more positive emphasis: one of the unnoticed elements of the production of meaning within what is apparently the reproduction of what is happening, the familiar media claim to be showing things as they occur. Here it is a question of the position of the camera when there is fighting between the police and others who are presented as engaged in some kind of social disturbance. It is quite remarkable, and of course the reasons are obvious, how regular and how naturalised the position of the camera *behind the police* is in either newsreel or in fictionalised reports of that kind

of disturbance. The police are seen *with* the camera. The crowd, the disturbance, is object. It is significant that in *The Big Flame*, in contrast with the normality of this convention, the viewpoint is with the people being attacked. This is a useful reminder, both for an analysis of this film and for analysis of the many hundreds of examples which must be seen as working the other way round, of the way in which the convention of showing things as they actually happen is inherently determined by viewpoint in the precise technical sense of the position of the camera.

Another local point worth analysis is the scene in the court towards the end of the work, where there is a problem of undefined political viewpoint. I have already said that the work is a combination of the techniques of classical realism in its extended sense — of realism plus hypothesis — and of political intention in the broad sense, to understand the nature of the movement from one kind of militancy to another, the development of consciousness, which at this level is still, although a specific left viewpoint, the viewpoint of a rather broad left. What happens in the court scene is the development of something else which I think in fact is the result of a more specific, indeed sectarian, viewpoint within the film. The judge in his speech moves well beyond the conventions of the naturalist method which has sustained the rest of the work. He makes an extraordinary assertion about the relation between dockers and students: that it's all right for students to have ideas of this sort, but if working men get them it's very dangerous. The idea that it's all right for students is, I think, the product of a particular sectarian position which develops into an implication about intellectuals generally; and the judge is in effect made a straight man for this sort of sectarian point. It would not be so noticeable were it not inserted within a work which on the whole develops along more consistent conventions in which what is said is conceived as what is typical. The judge speaks more like a character in a Brecht presentation, and this inconsistency is significant not just as a problem about method and technique, but as an illustration of the way in which, as I think, inevitably, specific uses of method and technique are in the end inseparable from fundamental conscious or unconscious positions, viewpoints and intentions.

Towards the end of the film, there is the singing of the 'Ballad of Joe Hill', and this is worth a brief consideration. Obviously in one sense this is the classic ballad for the expression of a defeat from which new energy, new consciousness, can be derived: that Joe Hill was killed but never died, and the mood of the ballad moves straight into the mood of the final scene, in which out of defeat comes the slow new organisation, new consciousness, the possibility of the future. It is interesting because at one level the ballad and the mood are consonant, but it raises a very specific problem about the naturalist convention, because it is of course

- 72 the introduction of a much wider history, a much wider consciousness of the working-class movement as a whole, a use of a song of another place, another time; and again it is a problem, as throughout in the film, of the matching (often the failure to match) of the most immediate kinds of naturalist reproduction and the attempted (and often successfully attempted) introduction of the consciousness, classically defined as realism in contrast with naturalism, of the movements of history which underlie the apparent reality that is occurring. This is so deep and permanent a problem of the methods of naturalism and realism that this local example has a very obvious general bearing.

Then, finally, the question of the use of the 'real people', the non-actors, indeed the dockers, among actors in this play about dock life and dock struggle. The use of non-actors was extensive in early Soviet film and theatre: indeed, the problem of crowds could perhaps within that kind of production only be handled in that way, not necessarily for more than logistical reasons. But again it raises a question about the method. It is interesting for example that in Hauptmann's *The Weavers* what emerges, which is most uncharacteristic of plays about the working class, is the shape of the class as a whole rather than the more familiar figures of the representative or, even more commonly, the leader. As this comes into the question of dramatic method, there are some very interesting differences to note. In the film, undoubtedly the overall intention is the presentation of the general life, and when the dockers speak as themselves it is possible for the trained ear to recognise that speech which is at once authentic and rehearsed. That is to say, it is authentic in that it is the accent and the mode of speech of men reproducing their real-life situations. It is also rehearsed in that it is predetermined what they will say at that point and in what relation to each other. This is of great interest, and Loach and Garnett have given us more valuable material for thinking about this than any others in their generation.

It is interesting to look into the detail of this at the point of production, because the relation between the producers and the people whom they are at once serving and reproducing and, it should not be forgotten, directing, is something we should explore and know more about, because there is a sense in which one can see the production of this kind of work developing into the gaining of consciousness by the producer rather than only, what the method implies, the reproduction of the development of consciousness according to an already finished script, which seems to be the dominant method. Indeed, we do need to explore, in detail and with many examples, the process of production on this precise point of the relation between the prepared script and the use of

people who are, in the significant phrase, 'playing themselves' – 73 but 'playing themselves' as roles within a script. There is also the problem in this reproduction of people in their own situations trying to understand their own conditions, developing their consciousness within the very act of production of the film, a problem of the relation between this and what is also evidently a kind of 'speaking to' both the real people finding themselves in their situation – presenting an argument to them about what they need to do next (because that, remember, is the hypothesis of *The Big Flame*; it is not what they have done but what they could do next), and the mode of speaking beyond them, to an audience, of what they could do next. There is a clear implication at the end of the film that the report of the occupation, although it is shown as defeated, is getting out to other people, and is shown as providing a model on which they could act. If we remember the period of the late 1960s in which the film was made – and indeed that period continuous to the present – then the movement towards occupation, the movement towards this new phase of working-class consciousness and action has been significant in British politics; it is perhaps the most significant contemporary action within it, and undoubtedly, I think, Garnett – who has spoken about this – would see the film as a whole (leave aside the dramatic hypothesis within the naturalist film) as a hypothesis within this larger relation of the work and the television audience. It is in that sense, feeling very much on the side of the makers of this film – that is to say sharing with them evident general political values, general dramatic intentions – that the problems, both the technical problems within the realist and naturalist modes and the problems of consistency within them, seem to me to deserve this kind of analysis.

What I have done is fairly preliminary, raising questions rather than answering them. But I wanted first to take the discussion of realism beyond what I think it has been in some danger of becoming – a description in terms of a negation of realism as single method, of realism as an evasion of the nature of drama, and the tendency towards a purely formalist analysis – to show how the methods and intentions are highly variable and have always to be taken to specific historical and social analyses, and then with that point established, to begin to approach this very difficult task of analysing what are at once the significant realist works and the quite unresolved problems of this kind of work. In our own immediate situation, if I have one final emphasis to make, it is that we live in a society which is in a sense rotten with criticism, in which the very frustrations of cultural production turn people from production to criticism, to the analysis of the work of others. It is precisely because these makers are contemporaries engaged in active production, that what we need is not criticism but analysis, and analysis which has to be more than

- 74 analysis of what they have done: analysis of a historical method, analysis of a developing dramatic form and its variations, but then I hope in a spirit of learning, by the complex seeing of analysis rather than by the abstractions of critical classification, ways in which we can ourselves alter consciousness, including our own consciousness, ways in which we can ourselves produce, ways in which indeed if we share the general values which realism has intended and represented, we can ourselves clarify and develop it.

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Class, 'Culture' and the Social Formation

Rosalind Coward

Even within the most traditional areas of Marxist thought, the years since 1968 have witnessed a reworking of Marxist theory in an attempt to deal with the problem of what is usually called the ideological. The questions of representation and ideology are increasingly acknowledged to be much neglected areas in the face of the need to develop a politics which includes such instances as the women's movement, and the need to account for political reaction following the unrest of the sixties. This reworking has brought about theoretical developments which have criticised implications of some earlier forms of Marxist theory. In this, the problems which semiology faced, and which some of *Screen*'s work could be said to have traced, have been exemplary, in beginning to pose the problem of the articulation of language and ideology through the development of a theory of representation.

Very little work, however, has been done on the implications of these theories of representation for existing theories of culture analysed specifically in its relation to class society, or indeed on the implications for a theory of class in general. In *Screen* itself, there has been little work which deals explicitly with the problems of class analysis. Indeed, often the analysis of ideology remains implicit rather than developed in the context of existing Marxist theories of the social formation. Other journals which concern themselves with roughly the same issues as *Screen* have been more explicit in the way the theory of representation is related to a class-divided society, and as such are habitually used to supplement *Screen*'s more detailed filmic and ideological analyses. I refer in particular to *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, the journal of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University.

The first appearance of this journal in 1970 coincides with the

76 shift in the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies towards a closer involvement with Marxist theory. The journal is widely used in media studies and has played a central role in the dissemination of Marxist 'cultural' and political theory in this country. It cannot be disputed that, in its role of developing a more sustained analysis of cultural formations in relation to Marxist theories, WPCS has been extremely successful and effective. It is precisely for this reason, that a serious discussion of the theoretical issues and their political implications is called for and a confrontation of the positions put forward in WPCS with those underlying much recent work in *Screen* and elsewhere. Implicit in some of the work of *Screen* is a notion of the ideological level which problematises given notions of class, and in particular those notions of class culture such as appear in WPCS, but the problems remain both unexplicated and often ignored. If these implications are to contribute to a Marxist theory of the social formation, it seems necessary to discuss them, and especially in relation to the work which already occupies that area.

In this article, I intend to examine the concept of class in relation to the work on signification and representation which writers in *Screen* have drawn on, and to discuss its relation to theories of the social formation. I wish to indicate how the problematic of representation in which *Screen* is situated implies a very different theoretical and political perspective from that offered by theories of 'cultural formations' which on first appearance offer an analysis rooted more firmly within a Marxist analysis of the social formation. I shall look at two major contributions to *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* which have been particularly influential. These will be 'Resistance through Rituals', WPCS 7/8, now reprinted as an Open University set text, and 'The "Unity" of Current Affairs Television', by the Media Group of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, in WPCS 9. The first deals with youth 'sub-cultural' styles as a particular form of class representation and raises problems of ideology and class relations. The second, the examination of a *Panorama* programme, involves work on ideology in relation to signification and theories of class. I wish to argue that the sort of theories of representation which *Screen* has drawn on also have consequences at the level of class analysis, and indeed at the level of conceptualisation of the social formation, which make untenable the sort of analysis in the WPCS texts where the ideological and political are finally reduced to being an expression of a class interest or position. To do this, the incompatibility must be demonstrated through an examination of the theoretical premises of these other analyses, from which it may become possible to suggest an articulation of ideology and class which is compatible with *Screen's* work.

It is usually taken for granted, though not very often elaborated, that it is the work of Althusser which provides the horizon of

Marxist theory in the work of *Screen*. His claim that the social formation is made up of three distinct practices, the economic, political, and ideological is thought to guarantee the notion of the relative autonomy of the ideological level, the ideological being understood as a practice of representation. In fact recently, *Screen's* work on ideology has been elaborated more within the context of what Lacan called the historically defined aim of the elaboration of the notion of the subject (*Le Séminaire XI*, p 73), as a result of the coming together of linguistics and Freudian psychoanalysis. Attention to this moment has provided for perhaps the first time a theory of representation which avoids idealist assumptions and which has been able to specify signification as a practice with its own level of determinacy and definite effects. As such it is opposed either to a notion of representation as the 'expression' of immanent meaning, or a notion of representation as a simple reflection, dependent on the classic subject of empiricism, a given subject, object and knowledge.

Even in any simple version of the social formation as base (productive forces, machines, raw materials, etc) and relations of production, with superstructures as the necessary articulation of those two elements, language has always posed a problem. If it is simply superstructural, why does it not alter with any transformation of the mode of production? If it isn't superstructural, is it then an element of the base? But in this case similar problems still arise; if it is a 'given' equatable with the organisation of the productive forces, how can meaning be explained by anything other than the idealist theory of pre-given expression of intention?

Seniology itself had to confront the problems of accounting for an articulation and its transformations without recourse to a humanist subject of this kind: a recourse which would be in opposition to the materialist aspirations of the theory. In order to do this, it was necessary to stress the more radical implications of Saussure's account of the sign, which alleges that a signifier is only established by its relation of difference to all other signifiers. In its earlier stages, however, semiology had developed the theory of signification primarily around the notion of the sign as a fixed arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. This tended to indicate an equilibrium between the two terms, and left open the possibility of understanding the signified as a separate realm of concept, pre-existing the particular articulation and then grasped by a consciousness outside the process of that articulation – that is, a transcendent consciousness. This either takes an idealist form where the subject is the source of those meanings, or a mechanistic form where the subject is a passive support for ideological meanings. It paralleled in this way the tendencies within structuralist thought towards a mechanistic version of the structure, made up of fully-constructed subjects and objects.

Lacan's work on Freud provided the way of developing that

- 78 radical potentiality glimpsed in Saussure's formulation of the primacy of the signifier. In attending to productivity and differentiation, particularly in the unconscious processes of signification, Lacan reasserted the claim that the signified only existed in the function of the chain of signifiers which produced it. The object of Lacanian psychoanalysis is linguistic: the speech of the patient, the dream as productivity of meanings. The unconscious motivation, that is, the position of the subject, is looked for in the particular configurations of discourse. In other words, the object of attention is production of representations in discourse through a particular subject position as the place of meanings. Against idealist interpretations of signification, Lacanian psychoanalysis develops a concept of discourse as the production of a certain subject with a certain meaning. The identity of a particular articulation is only produced according to the position of the subject in language. The sexual history of the individual which, at one level, psychoanalysis describes, traces the processes of splitting by which the effect of consciousness is produced in language. In the same moment, psychoanalysis indicates how every utterance could be said to inscribe a material position, a subject position, which is different in each utterance. A particular institution of signification can organise a determinate position of reading or meaning (see, eg, Stephen Heath's article, 'Narrative Space', in *Screen* v 17 n 3, Autumn 1976, which demonstrates the organisation of filmic space through narrative).

Ideology in this context could be implicitly understood as a system of representations dependent on a certain subject position, constructed by signifying practices. In so far as the signified, the represented, only exists as it is produced in signification, this development of theory no longer need look for a simple relation between the conditions of existence of the means of representation (economic and political determinants) and what is produced by the activity of those means. But this movement away from a 'represented exterior' of signifying practices towards a notion of the inscription of a subject position leaves the theory empty of any easy way of accounting for these representations in terms of a class analysis. And despite frequent admittance of the problems of the articulation with Marxist theory ('psychoanalysis and historical materialism', 'the question remains open as to the social and historical articulation and determination of the determining subject-structure psychoanalysis thus describes' and so on) it remains very much a question of some future integration with a pre-existent field called 'historical materialism'. There has been very little discussion of how to develop the implications of these theories of signification, particularly in the context of work within Marxist theory which is also criticising sociological notions of class and representations. It is not surprising then, with *Screen's* hesitancy in following the implications of the theory in its rela-

tion to Marxist theory, that cultural studies appears to offer a more 'Marxist' analysis of signifying practices and the social formation. In the following article, I want to show how the implications of Lacanian theory of signification radically transform existing sociologically-based versions of Marxism and provide a more genuinely materialist account of the process of representation.

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The article by Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts, 'Sub-cultures, Cultures and Class', in WPCS 7/8 'Resistance through Rituals' deals with the life-styles of various social groups as 'cultural formations', responses to determinate material circumstances. It is written specifically in reply to certain sociological approaches to 'youth culture' which, it is claimed, mythify the class relations which lie behind the 'phenomenon' of youth cultures. In its initial attempt to deal with these ideologies of class, and in its claim not to be simply offering a reduction to class, the article is important in this context since it exemplifies the problems of a theoretical position which starts from culturalist assumptions, and elaborates the notion of class from that perspective, drawing on a certain tradition of Marxist social theory rather than attempting to deal with the ideological both in its specificity and in its relation to class, and the implications of this for a theory of the social formation.

The cultural formations described as youth sub-cultures are located in a general theory of cultures as the product of responses to determinate material conditions. This general theoretical foundation is the interpretation of the term culture as:

'that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life, and give expressive form to their social and material life experience. Culture is the way, the forms, in which groups "handle" the raw material of their social and material existence' (WPCS 7/8, p 10).

Or again:

' "Culture" is the practice which realises or objectivates group life in meaningful shape and form. . . . The "culture" of a group or class is the peculiar and distinctive "way of life" of the group or class, the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, in the uses of objects and material life' (ibid, p 10).

In other words, in this analysis culture is both the determination of received material conditions and the production of meanings within that determination, since culture is understood as the active process of production of meanings.

From this perspective, the work continues by asserting that if we are interpreting the social formation in terms of a class analysis,

- 8o it must necessarily follow that the responses, the meanings, produced in cultural formations can be attributed to different material conditions:

'Just as different groups and classes are unequally ranked in relation to one another, in terms of their productive relations, wealth and power, so cultures are differentially ranked, and stand in opposition to one another, in relations of domination and subordination, along the scale of "cultural power"' (ibid, p 11).

In this way, different 'cultures' are asserted to exist belonging to particular classes or groups, and this difference is attributed to the fundamental social division in capitalist social relations; the difference between labour and capital.

'In so far as there is more than one fundamental class in a society (and capitalism is essentially the bringing together, around production, of two fundamentally different classes - capital and labour) there will be more than one major cultural configuration in play at a particular historical moment' (ibid, p 12).

In this analysis, bourgeois culture is seen as necessarily dominant since the bourgeoisie is the dominant class. All other cultural forms will, because of their objectively different material origins, be in some form of antagonism with the dominant order.

'Other cultural configurations will not only be subordinate to this dominant order; they will enter into struggle with it, seek to modify, negotiate, resist or even overthrow its reign - its hegemony' (ibid, p 12).

Here then is the premise on which this analysis of culture is founded and which informs the title of the collection in which this article appears, 'Resistance through Rituals'. A statement of this foundation is found in an earlier issue which describes a 'further phase . . . in any cultural studies: less literary, less reformist, less founded in and appealing to personal experience, concerned with the detailed study of hegemony and its various forms . . . the study both of a dominant culture and struggles against it' (WPCS 6, p 32). It is this premise which constitutes the appeal of WPCS especially within left wing education. It provides a way of interpreting educational practices as a function of capitalist relations, in which difficulties experienced by working class children in educational institutions can be ascribed simply to their difficulties in an alien culture. From this perspective, any evaluative schema is necessarily irrelevant, and moreover the cultural background of the working class can be attributed the same richness and complexity as that of the bourgeoisie.

It is within this context that the article develops its notion of sub-cultures as groups within a parent culture. Traditional forms of working class culture may have disappeared, but if life-styles

necessarily are responses to material (class) factors then 'phenomena' which to most sociologists do not arise from class factors can be reattributed to them — though now in the context of considering specifically 'generational' factors which would give to the sub-cultures their apparent difference from traditional forms of working-class culture. If the young people live in the same area and work in roughly the same jobs as their parents, then their life-styles must be 'mediated' versions of the parent culture:

'Thus we may distinguish respectable, "rough", delinquent and the criminal sub-cultures *within* working-class culture: but we may say that, though they differ amongst themselves, they *all* derive in the first instance from a "working-class parent culture": hence they are all subordinate sub-cultures in relation to the dominant working class or bourgeois culture' (*WPCS*, 7/8, p 13).

It is the material factors of life which determine the cultural formations; it is this which makes possible the conclusion that apparently radically different life-styles in fact do have a relation to traditional working class life:

'Members of a sub-culture may walk, talk, act, look "different" from their parents and from some of their peers; but they belong to the same families, go to the same schools, work at much the same jobs, live down the same mean streets as their parents and peers' (*ibid*, p 14).

Thus the analysis is hinged on the inseparable homologous relation between the economic categories of class and the production of culture.

It is the context of these definitions that the analysis proceeds to its challenge to 'post-war sociology', in particular to its theses of 'embourgeoisement', 'affluence', 'consensus', etc. The argument used against these conceptions draws very heavily on Westergaard who asserts that despite apparent shifts in class relations, and the emergence of such sociological theories to account for these, the relative division between capital and labour remained as marked as ever. The *WPCS* authors comment:

'This general rise in living standards critically obscured the fact that the *relative positions of the classes had remained virtually unchanged*' (*ibid*, p 22). /

The growth in white collar employment is reduced to being a redefinition of the old boundaries of class; the numbers employed may have increased, but the status declined as a result of rationalisation and automation. Accounts which attempted to interpret, and ascribe a possible effectiveness to the sort of social divisions produced in the real economic changes following the war are dismissed as ideologies, obscuring the real continued existence of class. The existence of such youth sub-cultures as the *Teddy*

82 boys and Skinheads is seen then as a particularly aggravating reminder of the

'stubborn refusal of class – that tired worn-out category – to disappear as a major dimension and dynamic of the social structure' (*ibid*, p 24).

The analysis of class then returns to an elemental division at the level of production between capital and labour; there is no attempt to deal with the effectivity of transformations and developments of social practices. They are all returned to the *relative* continued existence of the initial class relations of a capitalist social formation.

The only concession which is made to the effectivity of certain social and ideological transformations in the post-war period in this analysis, is to be found in the claim that social and ideological conditions were responsible for the breaking down of the traditional defensive working-class culture, but not for any real transformations. At this point the analysis takes over certain theoretical categories and premises from a definite tradition of British socialist history. History is interpreted as periods of crisis and stabilisation, according to whether existing forms of working-class parties have an 'incorporated or resistant role'. This particular form of social history admits at one level the role of the unions and the Labour Party as produced within a system of representations which is capitalist parliamentary democracy, but all the same attributes to these political forms the quality of being an 'expression' of real working-class interests, albeit defensive. In the sub-cultures analysis, the increasing place of the Labour Party within the parliamentary system in the post-war period bears witness to a loss of 'real defences'; this, coupled with the so-called 'double articulation' of specific generational conditions, produces the determinants which displace traditional defensive working-class culture, and mediate it into its appearance in youth sub-cultures:

'The full absorption of the Labour Party into its parliamentary electoral role within the state (the completion of a long historical trajectory) and the partial incorporation into the state apparatus of the trade unions, on the back of an "affluent" reading of the post-war situation, had real political consequences for the working class, dismantled real defences' (*ibid*, p 38).

It is at this point that the analysis introduces its particular interpretation of what constitutes ideology and its effectivity. The ideology of affluence is attributed a part in the displacement of traditional forms into their contemporary expression. But this effectivity is ascribed to a particular interpretation of Gramsci's conception of 'hegemony', which is used in this context as a descriptive category, to account for the fact that the ruling class often governs as much by consent as by force. The 'distortions'

carried out by post-war social theory are seen to indicate the functioning of hegemony at an ideological level: 'A hegemonic cultural order tries to frame all competing definitions within its range'; 'Hegemony prevails when the ruling classes not only rule or "direct" but also lead' (*ibid*, p 39).

These definitions indicate the theoretical principle on which the analysis is based; firstly, there is culture, a response to determinate conditions, which must necessarily be followed by the conclusion that there exist different cultures. The dominance of bourgeois *culture* is explained by the dominance of the bourgeoisie in power relations. The maintenance of this dominance is often achieved through coercion or control, but often by consent. When this occurs the term ideology is used, as distinct from culture and systems of representation. Ideology in this account is when one class *experiences* itself in terms prescribed by the dominant culture; 'Then the dominant culture has also become the basis of a dominant ideology' (*ibid*, p 12). It is dominant ideology in this analysis which has framed all the accounts of the social formation which propose to reduce the irreducible division between monolithic classes. To account for this, given that in its initial definition cultural formations only arose as responses to immediate material conditions, the analysis takes its only option which is to indicate material 'incorporation' into structures which are bourgeois institutions. Althusser's notion of Ideological State Apparatuses is mobilised in its most functionalist form:

'The State is a major educative force in this process (hegemonic dominance of the ruling class). It educates through its regulation of the life of the subordinate classes. These apparatuses reproduce class relations, and thus class subordination (the family, the school, the church and cultural institutions, as well as the law, the police and the army, the courts' (*ibid*, p 39).

If working-class passivity is to be explained, not at the level of any real breakdown in a definition of it as a class in itself, but by its incorporation into the structures of ruling-class control, then the analysis feels justified, theoretically as well as empirically, in suggesting that the cultures nevertheless remain intact.

If this is the case, and the cultures are expressions of material interests, even if framed in defence against bourgeois definitions, the remaining cultural forms of the working class can be interpreted as expressing an inherent anti-capitalism: 'Negotiation, resistance, struggle: the relations between a subordinate and dominant culture, wherever they fall in this spectrum are always intensively active, always oppositional' (*ibid*, p 44). This is because working-class culture is understood as an expression of interests which are not those of the bourgeoisie. The problem as to whether anti-capitalist values do in fact constitute a contribution to the

84 development of socialism, given their contribution to, for example, the rhetoric of Fascism, is apparently ignored. The assumption is that anti-capitalist 'resistance' does constitute a trend towards socialism. Thus it comes as no surprise to find the suggestion that socialism itself is only one kind of sub-cultural response. The difference in responses between those necessarily in the same material situation is to be explained according to the form of combination of 'structures', 'cultures', and biographies. These three remain separate levels of analysis. A necessary homology is posited between a determinate class position (here identified with the economic) and the systems of representations by which individuals live out their life. The article asserts that contrary to post-war social theory, there still exists a class in itself; certain life-styles bear witness to it as *an origin*, that is, what is represented in a complexly mediated way by contemporary life-styles. The political conclusion is that these life-styles can be equated with the continued existence of the traditional working class:

'The idea of the "disappearance of class as such" is replaced by the far more complex and differentiated picture of the different sectors and strata of a class driven into different courses and options by their determining socio-economic circumstances' (ibid, p 31).

The presuppositions of the work thus emerge as the following: the intentionality of the structure in dominance to reproduce itself; the assumption that the structure in dominance is preserved through the function of ideology which is the moment in which one class experiences itself in the terms ascribed by another class's culture; the understanding of culture as different for different classes, a corollary of its definition as the objective expression of material interests: the political, ideological and 'cultural' formations are conceived as homologous with economic categories of class. In this context, the culture of the working class is necessarily defensive and according to the analysis expresses a resistance to capitalist values. This is interpreted as one step on the route towards socialism. The primacy of consciousness as an object of study, perhaps the object of study, the instrument by which the odds for socialism can be calculated, is a marked feature of this work, and typifies much writing on 'popular culture'. It is necessary to discuss these theoretical premises, to expose certain inadequacies in order that any future elaboration of a theory of representation in relation to the Marxist analysis of the social formation avoids these mistakes.

In this summary I have presented the various strands of the argument as they appear in the text. In what follows, in which I will discuss some of the problems of the work, I will take the central terms in their relation to the overall theoretical principles. These

principles, which make up the work's distinctive contribution to 85 an analysis of cultural formations, involve the bringing together of a particular inheritance of concepts such as culture and consciousness with a certain set of Marxist categories – class, ideology, historical materialism and so on. The former concepts have a very wide currency within a certain humanist and empiricist problematic, even appearing in some readings of Marx. What I want to demonstrate is how the pull of the first (idealist) problematic leads to a certain version of Marxism (as it has done before). The discussion takes the form, then, of an outline of the first problematic and its influence on the particular version of historical materialism which is taken up.

The concept of culture is fundamental in the analysis of sub-cultural formations. As it appears here the term is clearly influenced by the liberal humanist cultural analysis typified by the work of Richard Hoggart in the fifties. It is seen as the expressive form given by groups to social and material experience; it is produced by distinct classes or groups through the activity of consciousness. Jim Grealy, in a paper called 'Popular Culture – A Critique' given at the SEFT Weekend School on Popular Culture in June 1976, has argued that the analysis of popular culture 'is damagingly inflected by its double origin: in conservative cultural analysis and in social democratic politics'. This argument is based on tracing the continued presence of the original evaluative aesthetics of Leavis, only modified by the concentration on working-class lifestyles brought to bear by Hoggart in 'The Uses of Literacy'. Terry Eagleton has also drawn attention to the 'left Leavism' of this development of socialist cultural analysis. What is neglected in this examination is the effect of this ideology on the recent developments of cultural studies in so-called Marxist theory.

If not explicitly Hoggartian (indeed elsewhere WPCS goes to some lengths to divorce itself from a conservative evaluative cultural analysis with roots in a Leavisite analysis of high art), the work in WPCS is still fundamentally premised on a conception of culture as the production of values and meanings and as the point of entry to any understanding of the social formation. Even within a context which appears to concern itself almost entirely with a materialist analysis of the social formation, the idealist notion of 'culture' is much in evidence. It is seen as a specific area and above all, an area whose operation is the production of meanings by individual consciousnesses. 'Sub-cultures, Cultures and Class' reiterates an earlier introduction in the journal to the field of cultural studies: 'Culture is the way social life is experienced and handled, the meanings and values which inform human action, which are embodied in immediate social relationships, political

86 life etc' (*WPCS* 1, p 6). In this way, the introduction continues, culture is located within definite historical and social contexts, but at the same time the 'dimension of meaning and praxis' is restored to the 'sphere of human activity'. In this premise, human activity produces social life, and this human activity is understood as the product of the human individual endowed with the inherent capacity to invest the material forms of existence with meaning. It is not that the analysis espouses either a simple notion of the human individual as transcendent origin of meaning, or of meaning as a simple reflection of the structures. Nevertheless, meaning itself is taken to be an unproblematic category, the product of a free human consciousness which has an inherent capacity to produce (or in the more economic-determinist versions, to realise) meaning. So, despite the attempt of the sub-cultures analysis to account for cultural activity solely in terms of a materialist account of the social formation, it nevertheless remains trapped in idealism, both in its initial premise of the free human consciousness endowed with the capacity to realise meaning, and also in the attribution of an essential creativity and activity to that free consciousness.

This object 'culture' is then the same concept that belonged to Hoggart's attempt to attribute meaning and value to working-class life-style, and as such belongs to a specific social theory. Thus even in trying to move away from Hoggart, this type of analysis remains bounded by the same liberal humanist problematic. To take over an object and its definition is never without implications. All concepts and objects classified are the product of specific social theories and theoretical practices, and as such are the product of and inscribe definite positions, both ideological and political. The result is the natural gravitation of the work towards both positivist sociology and an idealist version of history, and indeed historicism. This version of Marxism works as a solution to the search for a 'methodology for understanding the production of human meanings' (*WPCS* 6, p 10) from a problematic of humanism and idealism.

It comes as no surprise, then, to find the account of the social production of the individual in terms such as 'the passage through the structures' and 'class cultural apprenticeship': the division of the account into three levels, structures, cultures and individual biographies is no accident. It exempts the individual from the process of the structures, putting it in the position of coherent origin of practices, exempt from the contradictory processes of the structure and systems of representation. Within this theory there are only two possible ways of accounting for practice and transformation. The first is to fall back on the banal humanism of 'the revolutionary will'; the second – ultimately equally idealist – is to rely on a conception of history as the progressive unfolding of some inner principle, usually economic contradiction or some variant of 'structural causality'.

The problems in this kind of analysis are very great; it relies on culture as the product of consciousness, and a consciousness which is free from the action of the structure. This is true both in the exemption of the mode of analysis itself from any ideological or political construction, with the result that Marxism is seen as a tool, designed to discover the reality behind the phenomenal forms; and also in the setting up of 'consciousness' as the object of study, as the expression of material class interest, in which class is seen as some kind of intersubjective unity. It must already be apparent that this premise is incompatible with the materialist tenets of the Lacanian thesis of signification, denying both the construction of the individual as subject in the social process, and the replacements or displacements worked in each individual utterance. Instead it posits consciousness as a fixed reflection of the social order, either producing a 'correct' reading of real relations which will necessarily be an expression of socialist values, or a displaced, 'incorrect' ideological reading resulting from the distortion at the level of the object viewed, ie phenomenal forms.

What we have here, therefore, is a version of the classic subject/object problematic, in which knowledge emanates from the real object, through the sense of the subjects. The transcendental subject is the guarantee of knowledge, since meaning and the capacity to signify are taken to be immanent features of the human subject. This subject is no different from the classical humanist subject. Humanism, as Althusser writes, 'seeks to explain society and history by taking as its starting point human essence, the free human subject of needs, of work, the subject of moral and political action' ('Est-il simple d'être marxiste en philosophie?', *La Pensée*, October 1975, p 27). In the Marxist version of humanism, the free subject is 'alienated' by social structures: the products of his activity return to him as objects which are set against him in the form of religion, commodities etc. Communism is the reinstating of the essence of this free subject as the centre of society. It is possible to read not only the early but also the later Marx in idealist terms. For example, Ben Brewster has argued ('Fetishism in *Capital* and in *Reading Capital*', *Economy and Society* n 5 vol 3) that certain concepts present in *Capital* are particularly susceptible to an idealist reading. Perception in certain structures, such as fetishism of commodities, or the phenomenal forms/real relations division, involves a structure of misrecognition which implicates the humanist conception of consciousness. The subject perceives so-called phenomenal, not real, relations; misrecognition is thus attributed to the object known. Paul Hirst emphasises the ideological nature of such a reading:

'Whenever we encounter the position that ideological effects are given in the real (ie that it presents a misleading appearance) or

- 88 are the functions of the perception of the subject (whether the "bad side" of an empiricist knowledge or an empiricism congenital to the subject as being of error), we can be sure, whatever the apparent claims of the text concerned to be scientific, to embody structural causality etc, that we are confronting an ideological theory of ideology' (quoted Brewster, op cit, p 350).

In this context, the role attributed to intellectual work in the sub-cultures analysis becomes that of revealing the distortion operated by phenomenal forms. Perhaps it is this finally rather simplistic notion of the relation between theoretical work and political practice which explains some of the appeal of the position represented by this type of work. This position is one which posits a direct relation in which Marxist theory is put at the service of socialist tendencies which pre-exist any theoretical elaboration. In this way it reduces the pressing and difficult problem of articulation between the theoretical and the political, and the possibility of the mutual determination between these instances.

These theoretical foundations of consciousness and culture find a clear correspondence, in the text, with a certain version of Marxism, which also gives primacy to the place of consciousness, and which relies finally on a Hegelian interpretation of history as the progressive self-revelation of the subject. It involves a theoretical movement by which the division between labour and capital in a capitalist social formation is converted into corresponding subjective unities known as cultures. This permits the rediscovery of the traditional working-class image, and the claim for the continued existence of the class in itself which leads to the political aim of ensuring the transference of the knowledge of a class in itself to a class for itself.

Thus, by taking up the division of labour into the irreducible classes, capitalist/labourer, as the absolute foundation of material reality, the work can rescue a notion of a class in itself, and the necessary correspondence of culture to that category.

The problem here concerns not only 'culture' but also 'class' itself. In the 1950's it might still have been possible to assert an identity between life-styles, forms of work and positions in terms of the relations of production (ie capital/labour), and to regret the disappearance of a sense of that identity. Such a position has become increasingly untenable, because the social division of labour (political and ideological effects) has had a definite effectivity in producing the current very complex and contradictory class relations. Reducing these problems to a basic division labour/capital which has corresponding forms of consciousness eradicates the complexity of the political and ideological instances and falls back on a mythology of class.

The theory of class is part of the theory of historical materialism, and the reassertion of this particular 'mythology' of class is

evidently produced within a definite philosophy of history. It is 89 very interesting for this reason, since it exposes the necessarily Hegelian interpretation of history which lies beneath conceptions of history which take consciousness as the primary means of access to a theory of the social formation. Thus we find an account of history in terms of the progressive self-revelation of the spirit, a mode of analysis which can be found in Lukács.

The movement of history is convergent on a defined conjuncture, in Hegel's case, that of absolute knowledge, and the subject is an entity whose identity of self is always completed. The finished perfect subject, who already knows the end of the process, is the fundamental hypothesis of the Hegelian dialectic. It is even named as the substratum of the process; it is called self-consciousness. Lukács is primarily known for his appropriation of this schema, and his application of it to the class structure of society. Marxist theory of society becomes in Lukács an evolutionary theory, a logical, linear and hierarchical dialectical process in which the proletarian class is seen as the necessary bearer of progress. The dictatorship of the proletariat is conceived of as the realisation of the spirit of history. The work on sub-cultures is profoundly influenced by this ideology, and makes all the concomitant mistakes. It relies on a conception of history as the progressive unfolding of some inner principle (in this case economic contradiction); it conceives of all structures as the expression of the essence of a particular historical stage; it confuses consciousness with political and ideological representations, and relies ultimately on a 'belief' that the working class are the bearers of solution to conflict, that they somehow represent total mastery, the whole person which will be expressed in socialism.

In the analysis of sub-cultures, transformation is finally guaranteed by the working out of the fundamental economic contradiction between capital and labour, of which all individuals are agents or bearers. Each historical moment is understood as an expression of the balance between the two terms at a determinate moment, which is why history is taken to be periods of crisis and stabilisation, according to working-class interests 'expressed' in forms such as the Labour Party and the trade unions. This understanding of labourism which I have already outlined in summarising the argument about sub-cultures typifies much confused thinking on the left in relation to the political level. If the realisation of the full parliamentary status of the Labour Party is interpreted as the dismantling of real defences, due to incorporation into bourgeois political institutions, then political representations are being interpreted as expressions of needs.

Marxist thought, on the contrary, has always seen the State as the result of the division of labour, and as such, it is present only in particular modes of production, that is, those that have a class division. The existence of the State and politics are premised

- 90 on the existence of class: the State is the necessary representation of the class struggle at the political level. The political level is the necessary space of representations of various class positions. In capitalism, the State does not 'express' the interest of a given economic class: rather state apparatuses guarantee the continuance of the mechanism of appropriation of surplus labour by the ruling class. Political practice producing representations takes place at a particular conjuncture within determinate conditions. And moreover, these political representations are produced within determinate institutional formations (parties, governmental departments etc). But they could never be said to be expressions of objective material interests of a class. They are produced precisely in the contradictory relations of power between different classes and different groups, constituted in the social division of labour. Because of this, the existing political representations cannot simply be appropriated by the working class as the means of transformation of the mode of production. They will have their own level of determinacy, which involves the guarantee of the appropriation of surplus by the ruling class. The appropriation of the state machinery by a proletarian party does not necessarily destroy capitalist relations of production in their totality. In other words, it is no longer a question of whether Labour represents working-class interests, but rather a question of the political consequences of adopting such a theory since it clearly will affect the form of transformation of the mode of production.

We now begin to see more clearly some of the consequences of these theoretical premises; the social formation is understood in terms of an essential division between capital and labour which is directly reflected in economic classes, which themselves are reflected at the level of culture and ideology. Thus, the theory remains fundamentally committed to a conception of economic determination, with the economic understood, not as production and exchange relations, but as relations between monolithic classes, which are knowable through the object 'consciousness'. Even though the analysis appears at first to give attention to the ideological level, it becomes clear, when its conception of the social formation is analysed, that there is no autonomy attributed to the inscription of ideological or political representations which become simply functions or expressions of economic interest. In this way, issues such as the conceptualisation of the feminist movement or the possibility of politically reactionary positions of the working class are either ignored or, in the latter case, invested with a radical potentiality which is displaced according to the distortions operated by bourgeois ideology.

Further important consequences of the sort of reduction we have

seen at the political level, are operated at the ideological level. 91 This is exemplified by some of the work on media (particularly television) in WPCS. The article in WPCS 9 'The "Unity" of Current Affairs Television' (a study of a *Panorama* programme) gives a clear exposition of the problems that arise when representations are seen as the expression of a class behind the system of representations.

The *Panorama* study remains committed to the analysis of signifying practices in terms of the 'meanings' of two distinctive cultures. Television, widely accepted as 'popular culture' yet evidently the product of bourgeois institutions, immediately poses serious problems. The kind of solutions which are produced demonstrate forcibly the failings and limitations adhering to an account of the media which refuses to recognise the level of determinacy and effectivity of signifying practices themselves and the place of ideology within them. The position that dominates the analysis is that cultural control is exercised by the bourgeoisie through the operation of hegemony. Not surprisingly, the programmes chosen for demonstrating the existence of cultural control are news and current affairs programmes, which in fact have a more obvious affinity with political representations than do either fiction or documentary programmes.

It is claimed that the unity of function between bourgeois politics and ideological practices asserts itself most clearly in these areas: news and current affairs uphold the bourgeois notion of the state. The analysis begins from certain semiological presuppositions, primarily the presupposition of the organisation of signification as the production of certain meanings: 'meaning does not occur or appear "naturally" but must be produced or made to appear through a particular kind of practice; the practice of signification' (WPCS 9, p 65). However, this in no way follows the radical potentiality of Saussure's discovery that the function of the signified appears only in so far as it is an effect in the signifying process. It presumes instead that meaning arises through work of different codes: 'Several different codes are required to construct the meaning of a message: it is the product of several meaning-systems set to work in some form of combination' (*ibid.*). The codes belong in a homologous relation to the ideological meanings of a class. The organisation of discourse in current affairs is the result of certain conventions and journalistic practices which mediate between the real world and the 'message' of the programme. The message is carved out of real events, events which in this phenomenological perspective are taken to exist unproblematically and are systematised according to the representations of the dominant class.

'The process must still pass through the mediating structures of broadcasting itself: the broadcasters must select (and reject),

- 92 transform into " messages " (encode), develop formats, shape contents for the communicative circuit to be completed from audience to audience. Thus, though the " production " and " consumption " of media content are linked, and each is required for the production of the other, they are linked in the manner of *mediations* in a *process*. The opposite ends of the communicative process require an intermediary in order to form a unity and the effectiveness of this intermediary (and hence the maintenance of the whole) is dependent on certain conditions which it may or may not present. It is in and through that mediation – crucially . . . the originating functions of the broadcasters in initiating the circle of communications – that systematic distortions enter the chain' (S Hall, *The Structured Communication of Events*, CCCS Occasional Paper, p 4).

The media, then, is seen in terms of Althusser's assertion of the existence of Ideological State Apparatuses: a clear relation between State and the coverage of current affairs is posited which takes the form of disunity, contradiction and crisis always ending up with the hypostasis of the parliamentary system, therefore unholding capitalist democracy. ' Media neutrality and independence are therefore quite " real " in the sense that their function is essentially to try to hold the ring to sustain an arena of " relative independence " in order that this reproduction of the conditions of political power can take place' (WPCS 9, p 92). The analysis thus eschews any simplistic notion of ' bias ' and sees the relation between the State and current affairs coverage in terms of a system of signification which is organised into a specific discourse whose ideology is that of social democracy.

Nevertheless, there are two major problems with the analysis: the search for class origin of meanings, and the related problematic of different class readings. There is a persistent search for the origin of the position which, for example, *Panorama* inscribes. Because there is no sense of the determining action of the means of representation, the space of meanings which the programme delivers its representations to is thus attributed to a source ' outside ' the programme. And this source is interpreted as the homology of interests between broadcasters and the political representations of social democracy; the latter are interpreted as the necessary ' expressions ' of the objective material (economic) interests of the middle class to which the broadcasters and programme organisers belong. The analysis is therefore left at the level of a content analysis: the form is structured according to the content. However, given the problematic of monoliths of distinctive class meanings, the problem arises as to what extent working-class meanings are possible within the definition of the structure of broadcasting as being in the interests of the reproduction of the existing relations of production. To accommodate these

apparently contradictory premises, the notions of encoding and decoding have been brought into use. These are used to account for both the so-called 'preferred' meaning in a signifying practice, and also to the possibility of the preferred reading being resisted by a class in objectively different material conditions. Encoding refers to the process by which the events covered are structured in such a way that their message is overdetermined by the codes used by the broadcasters;

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'the broadcasters' objective is to have the audience reconstruct the programme as it has been *ideologically inflected and structured by them*. . . . The broadcasters' encoding practices, therefore, aim at establishing a transparency between the presentation of the topic, as embodied in the programme, and the view which their audiences "take" of it. The broadcaster tries, by all the technical and communicative competences at his command, to bring the encoding and decoding moments in alignment: it is an attempt to realise a kind of ideological closure, and thereby to establish a *preferred reading* of the topic' (WPCS 9, p 67).

Even within this model, the modes by which that transparency is achieved are neglected: signifying practices are attributed a neutrality which ideological meanings appropriate. It is for this reason that, within the logic, it becomes possible to allow the working class to have a different perspective within a signifying practice. The working class is thus rescued from subordination to bourgeois meanings. In other words the claim is made that the encoding process is never final. The middle class may wrap up the message but the working class has its own idiosyncratic methods of unwrapping it: ' . . . differential "readings" arise from the fact that events are interpretable in more than one framework or context: different groups and classes of people will bring different explanatory frameworks to bear, depending on their social position, their interests, place in the hierarchy of power, and so on' (*The Structured Communication of Events*, cit p 14). Here, then, is a very clear statement of how this version of culture conceives of ideology and signifying practices. Most obvious is the idea of coherency between a social group and its representations; not only unchangeable but also fundamentally not implicated in representations which are not homologous with its material interests. Thus the ideology of economic monoliths for which all practices are expressions is salvaged from the complex problematic of signification. The working class is not wholly 'incorporated' into bourgeois ideology; it 'resists', it 'negotiates', but hegemonic domination of the bourgeoisie is maintained in the end because it is that class which has access to and control over the means of production.

The Panorama programme analysed clearly does organise and produce representations of events which have a relation to the systems of representations of parliamentary political practice. But

- 94 to draw the conclusion from this that the media functions (like ideology) in order to reproduce the existing relations of production is to retreat from an integrally Marxist theory and practice. The problems of this kind of discourse are manifest in conclusions such as these:

'Thus the media remains a "leaky system", where ideological reproduction is sustained by "media work" and where contradictory ideologies do in fact appear: it reproduces the existing field of the political class struggle in its contradictory state. This does not obscure the fact, however, that the closure towards which this "sometimes teeth-gritting harmony" tends, overall, is one which, without favouring particular positions in the field of political class struggle, favours the way the field of class struggle is itself structured' (WPCS 9, p 93).

The statement is revealing for several reasons. In the context of the programme analysed, it is clear that Callaghan's dominance over Whitelaw during the discussion is interpreted as a moment of danger from the perspective of the media seen as having a function to reproduce the existing relations of production. This can only be understood in relation to what I have already described as a particular history of labourism. Callaghan is for one moment seen as a potential threat to the balance required in the interests of the representations of social democracy. Nevertheless, the analysis is dominated by another thread of the same argument about labourism which is the incorporation of labour into the dominant relations of the State. The media is seen as a State apparatus performing a role of upholding these interests in the last instance. The final aspect of the quotation is the space left for the working class to negotiate, or better still resist, the reading 'preferred' by the structuring of the programme entirely within the terms of parliamentary democracy. For this reason, it is referred to as a 'leaky system' — a system which prefers a meaning, homologous with the class which controls the industry, but which will always be read slightly differently by the working class. Their relation to the material real is seen as sufficiently different to provide the mode of decoding the image from an objectively different perspective.

Thus the analysis of the media is informed by all the problems relating to an overall class analysis. But it also manifests, in an even more obvious way, the idealism of any analysis which sets out from the phenomenological quest for 'real relations' and thereby ignores the problems of signifying practices and representations in their specificity. By this it reduces the place and effectivity of ideology. Not only does the analysis end up with the assertion of the coherence underlying ideological positions, but it also attributes to the media a role of function. We have already seen how these positions contradict a materialist analysis of the social formation

as consisting of practices and systems of representations which have their own level of determinacy. It remains to be a little more explicit about these theories in relation to materialist theories of signification, and the implication for theories of class in this. 95

Firstly, the developments of a theory of signification involving Lacanian concepts mean that signification is not referred back to the conditions of existence of the means of representation. It is never a question of what class produces what form or what content of a signifying practice, but rather how systems of representation inscribe (ideological) positions. Nor could it ever start from the assumption of a coherent subject outside the text as source of plenitude, origin of meanings, either in the form of the coherence of the ideological positions of the producers of the programme, or in the form of the audience. In other words, it takes for granted the determining action of the means of representation in constituting what is represented. This is not to say that there is no relation between the means of representation and their conditions of existence, but it doesn't mean that the means of representation 'represent' or 'express' those conditions. Rather, certain political and economic determinants obviously structure the social practice which is the media but the media does not necessarily represent the economic interests in which it is constructed. For example, the notion of the media 'objectivity' is in no way an objectivity only within the terms of parliamentary democracy. To say so, would fail to take account of the very real political differences between different programmes, even within current affairs programmes such as *Panorama* and *Weekend World*, let alone between current affairs and documentary or fiction.

Nevertheless it is possible to demonstrate a practice which inscribes an apparently neutral or objective position of viewing which has a very definite ideological 'represented'. In this respect, the work of the Glasgow Media Studies Research project, in their account of the news coverage of industrial relations in 1975 (*Bad News*, Routledge 1976) is useful. Though it is evidently influenced by some of the assumptions of cultural studies, it takes the claim for objectivity more seriously as the absolute guiding principle in new coverage. It then demonstrates the practice which constitutes news value and news coverage, showing up the processes of selectivity and organisation. *Bad News* shows the absolute disproportion of coverage of disputes from the car industry in relation to other major industries. It asserts that the presentation of these disputes was such as to posit an indissoluble relation between the economic health of the car industry and the economic health of the nation as a whole. The coverage almost invariably focussed on wage-settlements, and the Glasgow group suggest that the car industry played a role of embodying problems of production in an advanced industrial society: strike prone workers, cycles of prosperity and depression, competitiveness of the inter-

- 96 national market and its relation to the balance of payments; the relation of government to industry in matters of financial aid, the control structure and the promotion of industrial efficiency.

The representations organised by the practice of news, then, could not be said to function as representations of the 'interests' of capital, thereby serving to reproduce existing relations of reproduction. Rather, the process of coverage — the narrative movement from disruption to (usually) wage settlement in the context of the economic health of the country — inscribes a certain ideological position. This is the contradictory position of political representations of the question of production, pitched in the 'given' conditions of industrial capitalism. But the organisation of representations to produce such a position of viewing is neither the product of given represented economic facts, nor an economic class represented. Nor can the organisation of this position of viewing be said to indicate anything about the intrinsic class position of the audience. These questions are irrelevant; what is relevant is the effect of these representations and their relation to the possibilities of transformation of the mode of production according to the state of the class struggle. It is no longer desirable to talk of certain television programmes or music as working-class culture, or of control of working class by the imposition of the interpretation of events according to middle-class values. Certain practices have systems of representation which inscribe certain subject positions. Thus a 'Carry On' film would not represent working or lower-middle class values, but would be a specific practice which involves a very definite organisation into certain representations which can be given the purely descriptive tag 'lower-middle class'. This in no way entails a reproduction of those values. It is only by accounting for signification and ideology in this way that a level of material effectivity can really be attributed to ideology.

To analyse the media in terms of an ideological function confuses concrete institutions, social practices and signifying practices with the material effects of ideology. In other words, it ignores the inscription of ideological positions, except in so far as they can be reduced to an economic category outside the text, organising the representations. But to reject this analysis still leaves us with the problem of what then constitutes the determination on ideological instances as part of the social formation, and what can be said about class relations within this. At first the formulations remain negative; they indicate the untenability of the notions of class drawn on by the two articles I have been criticising, in relation to a materialist theory of signification.

By attacking the premise of the continued existence of class monoliths, which inform all 'expressions', I do not want to lend support to right wing ideologies of the disappearance of class. Neverthe-

less, it seems necessary, if the autonomy of the ideological instance 97 is to be given any real theoretical validity, that these concepts be re-examined.

According to Marxist conceptions of the social formation, capitalism can be defined as creating the conditions of existence of the following classes: wage labourers, capitalists (industrial, commercial, interest-bearing and landed), and petits bourgeois (independent producers, small capitalists). Even at the economic level, these groups do not represent homogeneous areas of interest; indeed, antagonism between industrial capital and finance capital is one of the most important features of the contemporary capitalist economy. Nor do these divisions correspond to the social division of the labour force into, for example, managerial/non-managerial, skilled/unskilled etc, let alone the division male/female. As Hirst has shown in his article 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (*Economy and Society* n 5 vol 4), the latter categories may all consist of wage-labourers who do not own the means of production. But to put all into the same category only provides an abstract description. The class of wage-labourer formed by capitalist production is abstract to these divisions of the labour force. Such divisions are not recuperable to the relations of production by such terms as productive/unproductive labour; the attempt that lies behind such reductions is to establish the unity of relations of production. It is quite clear that the diversity of forms belongs to other determinants: political and ideological instances.

The sort of convolutions undergone when faced with the question of the sexual division of labour is illuminating in this respect. The conflation of the effects and the level of determinacy of the sexual division of labour with the relations of production typifies these distortions. The 'domestic labour debate' is underpinned by such notions (for a summary, see *WPCS* 9, pp 95-118).

If the issues raised within the women's movement are not to be consigned to second place, to wait their turn on class divisions, but are to contribute what has been a specific history of ideological struggle, then it is quite obvious that ideological divisions must also be taken into account in any theory of the social formation, and not reduced to class divisions.

Psychoanalytic theories of signification have demonstrated, not what is usually attributed to them – that is, the predetermined unchangeable construction which excludes the possibility of struggle against that construction – but a mode of analysis of the relation of sexuality to discourse and the possible determinacy of the latter. The consequences of developing this work might well be to transform existing theories of the social formation and, reciprocally, psychoanalysis itself. But there is very little to be gained from looking 'behind' all systems of representation for

- 98 a class which is either the origin of these representations or their unfortunate victim.

The work on signification has already shown that the signified does not exist except as a function of a particular signifying process. Social practices and systems of representation have their own level of determinacy and effects. This is not to say that the question of class disappears. It becomes rather a question of assessing those systems of representation and their effects from within a political perspective that takes class contradictions as the area or site of transformations. In other words, ideological and political practices can be evaluated in terms of what position is inscribed in relation to class contradiction and transformation of the mode of production. Equally, practices which operate decisive transformations in existing ideological positions need not be reduced to class origins, but can be seen to have a political role in their challenge to the continuation of the conditions of existence of the capitalist mode of production at an ideological level. In this way the specificity and level of determinacy can be attributed to certain social practices of signification in a way which opens the analysis to consideration of the conditions of existence of the articulation, eg the social institutions and practices in which they arise, such as cinema and television, but without mistaking those conditions of existence as the product of class interests.

It is not only a question however of the reduction to monolithic classes and their cultures, and its subsequent reduction of ideology to false representation; it is also a question of the attribution of an absolute determinacy of the economic to the social formation. We have already seen how since 1968, attention to the ideological instance has been a definite feature of the development of Marxist theory. Recently, the argument against simple economism has been developed further by Barry Hindess and Paul Q Hirst in *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (Routledge 1975). The conclusions of this book have far reaching implications for existing 'Marxist history' and theories of the social formation which rely on a notion of the absolute determinacy of the economic. Such developments would clearly have consequences in relation to the sort of theory of signification which I have been discussing, since they would make problematic any simple equation of political and ideological representations with the economic, without excluding their articulation in specific discourses.

A Marxist theory of the social formation disposes of the problem of origin, and takes for granted the pre-existence of human sociality. It is not altogether uncommon to find in Marxist theory itself that the basic structure of the social formation is posited in the form of the necessary dominance and determinacy of the economic structure. Marx, in the 1859 Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* did attribute to the economy the role of 'struc-

ture' or 'base' in capitalism. He describes it as the foundation for the political and legal superstructures which have definite corresponding forms of social consciousness. But this attribution did not mark a transhistorical factor; it is only in capitalism that the economy need be both dominant and determinant. It is determinant in any conceptualisation of the social formation in terms of a structure with a hierarchy of determinants, in the sense that the conditions of existence of the dominant relations of production assign to each of the levels a certain effectivity and mode of intervention in relation to the other levels. If the dominant relations of production are antagonistic, that is if they take the form of a social division of labour between a class of labourers and a class of non-labourers, then the social formation contains a State and a political level as the necessary space of representations of the antagonistic classes. Such an analysis is far from economicistic or reductionist; necessary to the existence of a particular structure of economic relations are other levels: the ideological, economic and usually political. Indeed these other levels are themselves the dominant level in certain modes of production.

What is meant by the necessary structure of the social formation is discussed by Hindess and Hirst. They argue for the need to develop the Marxist concept of the mode of production, if Marxism is to avoid the idealism which goes with evolutionary accounts of historical development. They describe the mode of production as a 'determinate articulated combination of relations and forces of production', which defines the mode of appropriation of surplus labour. The notion of surplus has nothing to do with psychological needs, or 'given' demands. It is only defined in terms of the way in which the circulation of products is instituted in any society. Surplus labour exists in any mode of production, given that the conditions for the reproduction of the labourer are not equivalent to the conditions for the reproduction of the economy. The precise form however is a result of a particular mode of appropriation. What is important here is that it is the mode of appropriation of the surplus labour which defines the relations of production and which then determines the productive forces. The structure of the forces of production corresponds to the relations of production as the indispensable condition of the functioning of a determinate mechanism of extraction of surplus labour. This form of correspondence is no more than an effect of the structure of the mode of appropriation.

Thus the relations of production (under capitalism-commodity circulation and profit for example) are only understandable in the context of a structure of economic social relations which includes as necessary to its existence certain ideological and political conditions. Not only is the economy not assigned a dominant role in general, but the economic social relations are themselves structured by the mode of appropriation of surplus labour. This mode

100 can be dominated by ideological instances. The analysis moves away definitively from the idea of the necessary dominance of the economic, found in the premises of economic base and corresponding superstructural formations, and also in the notion of 'determination in the last instance' by the economic. It replaces these with a theory of the social formation, as 'a complex structure of social relations, a unity of economic, ideological and in certain cases political, structural levels in which the role of the economic is determinant'. While the economic, itself constituted by the determinate articulation of levels making up the mode of production, determines the conditions of existence of the political and ideological levels, these levels are not reducible to a correspondence to the economic social relations. They constitute definite social practices with certain systems of representation, which have, as we have seen, their own level of determinacy and effectivity. Not only this, but the analysis, while placing class as an economic category, does not consider it to be the 'origin' of the social formation: relations of production are understood as much in the guise of modes of exchange – for example, commodity circulation and profit.

Conclusions

The work of *Screen* on representations has been illuminating in beginning to pose the question of the form of relation between the means of representation (signification) and the determinants of the practices entailed in the action of the means of representation. It has avoided questions of the 'origin' of ideas represented, in the sense of originating in a class of particular 'needs' (alienated or otherwise), and replaced this with a notion of signifying practices whose signified is only produced in the activity of those practices. And drawing on Lacan, who has contributed to linguistic developments through describing structures of organisation of signification which would otherwise be endless productivity and difference, it has also posited the implication of a certain subject to produce the incidence of the signified in a signifying chain.

In this respect, the work has traced the early beginnings suggested by *S/Z*. The story of Sarrasine chosen by Barthes was particularly significant in its revelation of the conditions of existence of the so-called real in classical realist texts. It emerged in the problem of Zambinella's castration, which is the enigma whose progressive solution constitutes the narrative. The enigma of what characteristic constitutes Zambinella is not named in the text; rather the narrative traces the problem of the artistic representation of that which is neither 'he' nor 'she' but simultaneously

masculine and feminine. The castrato can only be named and not described in any way which does not disturb the divisions and differences around which characteristics are conventionally organised. In the castrato's insertion, the transparency of language which classic realist writing traditionally assumes in describing the 'real' is brought to the point of exposing its own practices in that construction. To describe the castrato (rather than simply name it) would involve a disturbing antithesis, inserting itself between the division masculine/feminine: this would be a different practice of writing, a practice which could speak its own foundations, that is the construction of the division.

It is this work, recently developed further in terms of cinema (see, for example, Heath's 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis' in *Screen* v 14 n 1/2, Spring/Summer 1973) which demonstrates the implication of sexual construction in the production of discursive reality by the production of a certain relation signifier/signified through the position of the subject. But such an assertion does not have an easy compatibility with either the notion of ideology originally taken up by Althusser, nor with the kind of criticisms levelled at this position by Hirst and others; so it still remains necessary to discuss the relation of this work with a general theory of ideology which the work is sometimes claimed to represent. Heath has gone some way in raising problems of the 'articulation' of historical materialism and psychoanalysis:

'Psychoanalysis must be established and exploited within historical materialism. There is no subject outside of a social formation, outside of social processes which include and define positions of meaning, which specify ideological places. Yet this inclusion, definition and specification does not exhaust the subject; at once because it says nothing concerning practice and also because it says nothing about the material history of the construction of the individual for such inclusion, definition and specification. It is this latter area that psychoanalysis effectively identifies and opens up (the new "continent"), that it takes as its province' ('Anata mo', *Screen* v 17 n 4, Winter 1976-7, p 61, italics mine).

He continues by saying that the main problem that psychoanalysis finds difficult is the problem that ideology and the symbolic are not a separable progression, but, like the recto and verso of a sheet of paper, are simultaneous, and the real problem then is to elaborate that simultaneity: this would provide a reading of psychoanalysis *within* historical materialism, and not as an appendage grafted on to account for a lack in Marxism. In other words, the structure of the 'symbolic' is to be conceived, as Kristeva advocates, as the limiting of the productivity of language, as a 'threshold of meaning' which has no existence outside a specific historical and social formation. Correctly, Heath identifies the shortcomings of traditional Marxist theory which has left the

102 subject as either origin of the structure (eg in the banal humanism of notions such as praxis) or as bearer-support to the ideological places (eg Vygotsky's work, where the infant is abandoned to biology until its acquisition of language where it becomes a support for the social formation). But it does little for answering how psychoanalysis, the model of which is the individual in its construction *in language* (which construction constitutes the unconscious), is accountable for a general theory of ideology, or perhaps more important, whether such a general theory would be desirable or correct within Marxist theory. It reasserts the necessity to consider the specific level of determinacy of language and its specific effects, effects of consciousness and sexual positioning.

The question remains, however, as to how this specificity is equatable in any unproblematic way with Marxist theories of ideology. There are obviously no grounds for upholding a notion of ideology whose function it is to reproduce the social formation. Nor can the Lacanian theory have any relation to those theories involving a concept of misrecognition as false consciousness, thereby assuming, even if it is always unknowable in any finite sense, that reality can be described by theory, and that ideology operates a systematic distortion or falsification of that reality. This latter would have to rely on a privileged relation between knowledge and its object (to be in a position to know the real beyond the phenomenal forms); ultimately this can only rely on an idealist form of consciousness. Criticism and displacement of this category could be said to constitute the major contribution of Freudian psychoanalysis to any theory of the subject and representation. The displacement of consciousness as the centre of analysis is primary in any argument that wishes to state the place of psychoanalysis within a Marxist theory. The assertion that the unconscious participates in the functions of ideation and thought, in such a way that parapraxes etc bear witness to, displaces the notion of a unified consciousness, a notion which has always been incompatible with historical materialism as a theory of social processes, practices and transformations. Such a theory operates as a radical subversion of consciousness either as origin of meaning or as passive appropriator of meaning that is constituted by social processes. The pursuit of a topology of the unconscious, elaborated through language, accounts for the process by which the effect of consciousness is constituted. The consequence of this process is the construction of the unconscious. But it is no longer a constitution which attributes the punctual source of man's symbolic system to a transcendent consciousness, but rather a constitution premised on absence: the subject is always absent until it produces itself, decentred in the structure which already includes it.

It is important to stress this factor in order that Lacan's account should not be dismissed as supplying complexities to a

basic commitment to traditional notions of consciousness. Such is thought to be the case with his contribution to Althusser's formulation of the imaginary, which Hirst (*Economy & Society*, cit) demonstrates is unable to rescue Althusser from the traditional subject of philosophy. This is so, even though Althusser has obviously imported the term in an attempt to avoid any simplistic idea of misrecognition as either originating in the viewing subject, or in the object seen. As it operates in his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', however, the term 'imaginary' means little more than 'that which is not real'; but Althusser's mobilisation of this specifically Lacanian term has the merit of acknowledging an inadequacy in the terms available for a Marxist account of ideological operations. As it stands, the term simply indicates the calling on the individual as agent, as a non-contradictory, homogeneous entity which is then the coherent support for ideological representations: It says little about social practices and systems of representation with their own action of determination in the production of the represented, or the place in that of the effect of consciousness.

Lacan's account of the imaginary, elaborated in the context of an account of the subject as the process of language itself, does not presuppose these fundamental categories of either consistency or pre-given potentiality of perception. To say that the subject is the same process as language itself has extremely important theoretical consequences. It displaces traditional philosophic notions of the subject; it also involves a conception of the 'individual' radically different from that usually attributed to psychoanalytic theory. Lacanian psychoanalysis is not about the sexual history of the individual but is concerned with discursive space and its effects; each utterance involves a different place of meanings, a different subject as the point of distribution of position, that which guarantees the attribution of relations between disparate significations through a particular theoretical or ideological position. Lacan himself is careful to stress the primacy of an account of signification above an account of developmental stages, such as the imaginary, en route for the accomplishment of a consistent subjectivity. In the 'Topic of the Imaginary' (*Le Séminaire I*, pp 87-103) Lacan provides the model of the experiment with the curved mirror and the inverted bunch of flowers. An image of a vase containing a bunch of flowers on top of a wooden box is produced by a spherical mirror from an original arrangement of an empty vase on top of the box under the lid of which hangs a bunch of flowers. This experiment is used to demonstrate how the illusion is produced only if the subject is in a particular position of viewing. This is used as a metaphor for the fact that it is language which provides the positions through which the real can be included in the imaginary, and that neither of these categories exists except in their articulation through symbolic positions. This

- 104 early formulation in Lacan's work has recently been extended to emphasise even more forcibly the role of the Other in the construction of these positions (see Jacqueline Rose: 'The Imaginary Signifier', BFI/EAS mimeographed paper).

It is the Other, the place of the signifier, language, which determines the structures even of identification, not a development of a 'perception' of consistency which is then the foundation for all future identifications. It is here that Lacan's work has been taken up for analysis of cinema, and Stephen Heath in particular has followed up this later emphasis to demonstrate the heterogeneity of the cinematic image which is then organised by specific cinematic practices. It is heterogeneous in that the screen, as Lacan notes, resembles the system of inscription of the viewing subject itself. The imaginary where the subject is formed in a structure of separation, thereby setting up the possibility of predictable relations (subject/other distinctions), contains a potential reversal: 'In the scopic field, the look is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture' (*Le Séminaire I*, p 98).

In this context, the account of the individual construction has no place for idealist notions of consciousness or subjectivity; it is rather an account of the acquisition of language from the structure of otherness, producing a subject as point of distribution of the position which organises discourse. The classical subject disappears; what remains is what has not yet been spoken. It is the subject as the place of articulation of the discrete elements of discourse which have no *necessary* relation. To my mind, this account has two levels of description at the moment: signifying practices in general and the account of the individual and the individual unconscious. The first provides a mode of description of systems of representation and the possibility of an account of the relations of determination with the means of representation and their transformations. The second, which has traditionally been the specific object of psychoanalysis as a science, need not feel ashamed for not having a place already in 'historical materialism'. Marxism has never properly accounted for the individual construction; it is a political economy, and as such *Capital* describes the *relations* which constitute capitalist society, relations which more often than not are not between people (agents) so much as between forms of organisation of the economy. Marx's own formulations on the relationship between conceptualisation, the individual and the economic structure are themselves open to question, while certain developments of vulgar materialism are worthy only of ridicule. Marx himself, writing in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, demonstrates an idealism in relation to the subject which could be said to remain even in *Capital* (eg fetishism of commodities, the division phenomenal forms/real relations, both tending to posit a transcendental consciousness as guarantee of

' On the one hand, therefore, it is only when objective reality universally becomes for man in society the reality of man's essential powers, becomes human reality, and thus the reality of his own essential powers, that all objects become for him *objectivifications of himself*, objects that confirm and realise his individuality, his objects, ie he himself becomes the object ' (Early Writings, Penguin/NLR 1975, pp 352-3).

In other words, the working class is to be seen as the route for the realisation of the total man, the man free from lack and conflict. He is the solution to the conflict and alienating structure constructed by bourgeois society. Such a theory, based on an assumption of human needs alienated in a structure, and tending towards mastery of conflict and alienation, demonstrates at this early stage Marx's continued adherence to the Feuerbachian conception of man in a position of ultimate human unity. Marx continued implicitly with this notion when he located man exclusively in the State, which then anchors these relations of need and suffering. In this way, despite having developed a theory of the materialist processes of the social formation and their possible transformations and contradictions, Marx's notion of man nevertheless remains untouched as a unity, in conflict with others but never with himself. From this perspective the subject will only ever be neutral, oppressor or oppressed, leader or led, never a part of a materialist process, a contradictory subject produced only in specific articulations.

Thus the Lacanian account of the subject as the same process of signification inserts a materialist analysis of signifying processes, of discursive practices involving subject positions, and also of the individual as subject. It is not necessarily reducible in any easy way to existing notions of ideology. But if you accept the materiality of ideology as non-unitary complexes of social practices and systems of representations, it clearly is elaborated in precisely that space which both accounts for and begins to describe the action of the means of representation.

The analysis can only provide an account of representation in relation to the social formation if it is developed in the context of these questions. It is then possible to disentangle the confusions which casually merge representations with a general theory of ideology. To do this would establish the grounds for the absolute displacement of the kind of sociologistic reductionism which this article has discussed.

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Regional Groups

For some time SEFT has been looking for effective ways of expanding its work outside London. Recently there has been a development which we want very much to support and which we hope could be the basis for a new pattern of activity.

In 1975 two regional film groups were formed — one was a SEFT reading/study group established in North Staffordshire (a report of this group's work was published in *Screen Education* 20), and the other was a film and television teachers' association established in the North East (a report of this group's work was published in *Screen Education* 21) who have become affiliated to SEFT. In both cases the decision to form such groups was taken independently but they have kept in close touch with the SEFT office in London, sending copies of minutes of discussions etc. In 1976 two further groups were established — one in Glasgow and the other in Manchester. We would like to encourage the creation, wherever possible, of similar groups which would largely base their work in the general areas of the concerns of the Society and its two journals, but of course making their own decisions about organisation, procedure, field of interest and programme of study. Teachers, for example, might be particularly interested in establishing curriculum development groups.

In order to encourage this potential area for development we have produced a complete regional list of our membership organised according to the counties of Great Britain and countries of the world. If any readers who are also members of SEFT are interested in helping to form such groups they should contact us and we would be very pleased to provide, free of charge, a copy of this list, so that they can contact other members in their area. We hope to be able to assist such groups (and their creation) financially, initially with postage costs but eventually, if the venture proves to be successful, with possible film hire, duplication of materials, travel costs, etc.

We hope that as many of our members as possible will feel able to help in the formation of such groups for we are very keen to increase the intercommunication, both within and between regions, including London.

The Independent Film-makers Association – Annual General Meeting and Conference*

Jonathan Curling and Fran McLean

In the Introductory paper to the 1976 Conference, 'Independent Film-making in the '70's', the Organising Committee states: 'The struggle for the rights of an independent film culture must include all those who are involved in the production of film meaning – that is, not only independent producers, but also exhibitors, film teachers, critical workers, and film technicians.' The initials IFA, however, do not stand for the Independent Film-meaning-makers Association, nor is the Association comprised solely of film-makers, and few members are independent of anything – except the money with which to work! There is as about as much logic in that sentence as there was in the bonds that brought together the diverse interests represented by the IFA in May 1976. Even now it is difficult to describe the constituency of the IFA. Indeed it can only be properly identified in terms of its activities, represented in the policies adopted by the AGM.

As the 1976 paper states, the formation of the IFA in 1974 can be located in a meeting convened in the wake of a TV programme on 'Independent Cinema'. This programme had so outraged certain film-makers that they made a collective protest to the BBC, the response to which was a statement from Aubrey Singer, Director of Programming for BBC2, 'I'm not having that sort of film on *my television*'. While this event marks the formation of the IFA, its origins are traced to a more specific conjuncture of social and political forces which on the one hand produced the London Filmmakers Co-op and other film-making collectives dedicated to the politicisation of the cinematic institution, and on the other hand inspired certain struggles within institutions,

* This paper represents the views of its authors and does not constitute the opinions of the IFA.

108 such as the BFI Members Action Committee in 1970, which led specifically to the somewhat illusory right of the BFI membership to elect two governors, and more generally to a more vital approach by BFI departments to the formation of their policy. In general the period is marked by the struggle to establish a base for independent film-making in Britain. It is the role of the IFA to develop this base into an expanding critical film culture.

The February 1977 Conference was the first Annual General Conference of the IFA, marking its constitutional formation and the adoption of policy, which had been debated and proposed over the nine months from May 1976. This gestation period has been critical in that the work performed by members leading up to the conference has determined the direction that the IFA is to take, and thus the constituency whose material and political interests are represented by the Association. Members were invited to submit papers and proposals, either on the regional basis on which the IFA is organised, or individually. A fair amount of material was submitted, in particular papers from the working parties that were established in May 1976.

The first third of the conference was organised on the basis of small workshops to discuss the three major topics for which papers had been prepared: the IFA's relation to the State, the ACTT, and the social practice of production, distribution, exhibition, and criticism. The last two thirds of the conference were spent in perpetual plenary, debating motions arising out of the workshops, clarifying and voting on policy, and discussing constitutional issues, the constitution itself, the relation of the regions to the central body, the formation of the National Executive, and lastly finance.

It was with some embarrassment that the Treasurer announced at the end of the conference what it had cost and that a substantial proportion of the cost had been donated by the Regional Arts Associations and the BFI Regional Department. It was perhaps fortunate that this was not generally known, at the start of the weekend, in the workshop on the IFA's relation to the State, for it would be hard to imagine even the most fervent idealist arguing the independent status of the IFA. Indeed, a materialist practice can proceed only on the basis of analysing *dependent* relations and identifying the institutions which affect that practice. The practice of the IFA, therefore, consists of intervening in the institutions which affect independent cinema; that is, in particular, institutions such as the BFI, the Regional Arts Associations, the Arts Council, SEFT etc, and more widely in the area of ideological structures. Thus the IFA conceives of itself not just as a group of film practitioners, but as a group of activists working with and within cinema.

It is significant, therefore, that the paper for the first workshops on the IFA's relation to the State should have emerged from the

ongoing dispute of IFA film-makers with the BFI Production Board in relation to their respective rights, most importantly distribution and copyright, over films produced with Production Board backing. In outlining the material conditions from which the dispute has arisen, the paper points to the continuity and growth of IFA members' production practice from before the time when the Production Board acquired its present role in independent film production. However, although the increased budgets the Board has had at its disposal since 1974 have been severely eroded by inflation, it has become increasingly significant as a financier of British films in recent years. The more professional, 'industrial' approach that is heralded by its new policy – characterised by Peter Sainsbury as 'the shift from Patron to Producer' – seeks to continue the trend and is being examined in relation to proposals for recapitalising the film industry at large and the setting up of the British Film Authority.

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Within this context, the discussion centred around the labour that is invested by film-makers in the production of their films, since the BFI budgets remunerate labour only at the immediate-preproduction, shooting and post-production stages (research, scripting, overtime etc are not allowed for), and even this labour is valued at half union rates or less. This seems to be a site of contradiction, for if the Production Board is moving in a more professional/industrial direction, then logically labour should be remunerated at union rates (a point that was pursued in discussions of the IFA's relation to the ACTT), but if on the other hand, the Board is not able, within the restrictions of its present budget, to remunerate labour at its industrial value, then it must recognise that the unpaid labour invested by film-makers in their films adds a certain credence to their political arguments for control over their product at all stages of production, distribution and exhibition. Any policy which deprives film-makers of such control, under these conditions of production, could mark a return to the very relations of production, imposed by capital, against which IFA members are struggling in militating for a cinema of 'social practice'.

It is not so much the fact of the BFI having a policy that the IFA is seeking to question, but the terms of that policy, the way in which it is being formed, and the rigidity with which it may be applied, in terms of both production and distribution. As should become clear later, what in fact the IFA is considering is what should be its relationship to the BFI, and other state-linked bodies, while it is attempting to develop an autonomous space of oppositional cinema.

In terms of distribution, for example, the IFA recognises that the BFI is intending to establish a circuit of coherently programmed independent film exhibition based around the Regional Film Theatres, and that this will constitute a progressive intervention

110 in film culture in general. As yet, however, this circuit is only potential, and if it is based solely around RFTs the intervention such a practice can make on behalf of independent film-making is necessarily limited to the 'art-house' film culture context. Indeed it is hard to see how a state-linked body could politically extend its field of operation beyond such a context, and consequently a contradiction emerges here between the BFI and the IFA, whose notion of 'social practice' demands the exhibition of films in locations which are precisely not assimilable into the art-house film culture. Hence the IFA would oppose the notion implicit within the BFI policy that it is only on the basis of the 'industrialisation' of film culture that more usage can be generated of independent films. We are using the word 'industrialisation' in a new context here, for we are referring not only to rationalisation of selection/production procedures, but also, and principally, to the circularity that is generated when distribution is also assigned on an exclusive basis. It is circular because film culture is fostered in precisely the areas where the Production Board will exhibit its films – RFTs, higher educational institutions etc – thus encouraging the funding only of those films that can be considered by the current *politique* as an intervention in film culture in terms of a variety of critical criteria. Money thus risks being diverted away from those films that serve other purposes than those of this *politique* and particularly those whose engagement is not directly with film culture as presently constituted but in other sectors of cultural and political life.

Historically, independent film-making has developed in relative isolation from state finance, developing its own infrastructure based on the distribution of its films by bodies such as The Other Cinema, Liberation Films and the Co-op. The existence of these bodies, whose future is threatened by the Production Board policy of exclusive distribution, occludes the fact that independent filmmakers have been most successful where they themselves have also been actively involved in the distribution and exhibition of their films. It is for this reason that a view has emerged of independent-film-making as not altogether successful, which is why it is crucial that the notion of social practice, and the attempt within the IFA constituency to develop such a practice, be recognised by the BFI. Otherwise it is probable that IFA members will have to try to open up funding areas which offer possibilities for making more substantial political and ideological interventions. Indeed several speakers at the conference voiced opinions that the IFA has been over-concerned with state finance and that a discourse produced from a position of incestuous collusion with a state body would by its very nature be unable to question adequately the relation of the IFA to the State which was the subject of the workshop/plenary. The issue at stake is whether it is possible or desirable for film-makers to exploit the diversity of state institutions. The

decision lies not only with the film-makers who must consider whether they are able to pursue their practices without state funds if the policies of those funding bodies are such that they exclude the said practices from consideration, but also with the funding body which must consider the constituency which it wished to support.

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In material terms if film-makers are unable to generate sufficient surplus, either from within an alternative distribution operation (which has proved difficult in the past), or from their own practices of exhibition (which is no less difficult), then they must appropriate surplus from the outside. This may be done in several ways. Film-makers are habitually used to working in the industry, teaching, taking part-time jobs, living on the dole (independence?), and it is on this basis that independent film-making has evolved. Another alternative is for them to appropriate cash for film production from institutions that are in a position to generate or hive off surplus. Several film-making practices, for example, are based on exploiting the tax and charity legislation loopholes. The State which is able to hive off surplus by the very nature of its fiscal role has inevitably become the prime target for film-makers, who must then struggle on and within those institutions which provide cash for film-makers. Hence the importance of the IFA's negotiation with the BFI, which is to be seen as a dual struggle, first to secure money for IFA film-makers, and second, to secure that money without compromising their practices and without abandoning the right of film-makers to control their films. Such abandonment would imply potential exercise of restrictions/censorship by that body, and since independent makers produce the films which have created the debate around which British 'alternative' film culture is now formed and which it is the Production Board's policy to support, then the BFI must be prevented from appropriating this practice as it has developed historically. The AGM therefore voted overwhelmingly in favour of the IFA Contracts Committee continuing to negotiate with the BFI to secure satisfactory contractual relations.

Although the BFI struggle is in some senses very particular to those film-makers whose interests are directly at stake, its implications are very important, not only in the realm of film-making (where it is crucial in view of the fact that any contract negotiated with the BFI will be a precedent for those who make films within the aegis of the BFI or other State bodies) but also in the realm of cultural production in general, where the issue must be examined within a political economy of culture. The development in advanced capitalist economies is towards a restructuration of production, and therefore consumption, in the direction of information-processing, or non-material production, and away from energy/matter processing, or-material production in the traditional sense. It is precisely this area of non-material production which is con-

- 112 trolled by the laws of copyright. It is therefore an integral part of any oppositional practice to use these laws when they are beneficial, and struggle against them when they are not.

Our analysis, however, must proceed further for thus far we have discussed the State only in relation to art-house film culture production. There is also that other area, the film industry, in which the State is present, either in its legislative role (its usual one) or in its nationalisation role, at present an absence. The difference between the two sectors is expressed in terms of the 'commercial' nature of the one versus the 'artistic' nature of the other. This difference is also expressed in terms of rights. If we consider non-material production in general, rights in the commercial sector are retained by or assigned to capital, as purchaser of the material base, whereas in the 'arts' sector they are retained by the artist, for it is precisely this that validates the essential bourgeois notion of the 'artist'. How does the IFA, which is opposed to both these categories, intervene in the area of copyright?

Within capitalism there is a general tendency towards the commercialisation of non-material production. This is connected with the declining capital efficiency of older media (such as cinema) relative to more advanced forms (such as TV with its electronic reproduction and distribution) which are less labour intensive and offer a lower cost per unit-output. Hence the crises of profitability in the film industry (the relation holds unless the cinema can produce a distinct commodity, which potentially it can) and the consequent marginalisation of all previous non-material production/art forms into 'art' culture subsidised by the State.

At the present moment, however, there is a crisis of profitability within capitalism generally, which has led to a fight for control of the tertiary sector, the sector of non-material production, between the State and private enterprise. At present the tendency is towards the commercialisation of, or at least the increasing influence of commercial values over, those domains traditionally the realm of the State including 'arts' and education. Hence the Production Board policy can be seen as a response to those forces that require productive efficiency in every sphere. The struggle between the IFA and the BFI is therefore seen as a struggle against the ideology of commercialisation. Thus, although it may appear that the IFA demands for control of their films are couched in terms of bourgeois values, this is because in the past it is precisely this 'arts' space that oppositional cultural workers have been able to exploit. If, as outlined above, this is becoming increasingly difficult, then it may arguably be preferable for the IFA filmmakers to position themselves as workers within this culture industry, while using their position as workers to maintain the practices they have developed.

The paper for the second workshop/plenary on the IFA's relation

Discussion in this area was particularly heated since the paper clearly evoked the political positions of IFA members, noting that 'the work performed by IFA members has and will continue to develop in the sharpest opposition to the long and well-established forms of film practice emanating from the industry.' Discussion thence polarised between those who considered it a priority for the IFA to align itself with the ACTT on the basis of struggling for the implementation of the nationalisation report, and fight for the recognition of IFA practices from within the union, and those who considered that the IFA should continue to develop its practices independently (independence for independents' sake?) until such time as a basis for negotiation with ACTT should arise. The hostility in this second position to an alliance with organised film

114 workers who are party to the reproduction of the aesthetics and ideology of the industry derived not only from consideration of what should be the IFA's priorities but also from a recognition of the limitations of the defensive trade union politics produced by the struggle between labour and capital in a declining film industry. Implicit within this position was the further argument that ACTT comprises not only film technicians and industrial workers with little control over the aesthetics and ideology of the industry within which they work, but also producers, writers and directors who are, at worst, committed precisely to the politics of dominant forms of representation or, at best, have not developed any opposition to them. Furthermore ACTT's periodic excursions into the politics of representation have been limited to such questions as TV's news manipulation in the sphere of industrial relations and the coverage of particular political events.

In the debate the majority situated themselves somewhere in the middle ground, agreeing in principle with alignment, but advocating a more cautious approach, especially since many IFA members are largely ignorant of the ACTT and the contradictions within it – for example the status of the nationalisation report is now problematic in the light of the realignment of political forces within the union which has taken place in the last three years. Being posed in terms of principle, therefore, the discussion tended to mask some of the concrete issues which were raised, such as the status of labour in IFA films financed by state bodies. If the BFI, for example, continues to cost labour at 50 per cent or less of union rates, there is a sense in which film-makers could be said to be performing scab labour, with the State adopting the mantle of capital in depressing the labour value accruing to film workers. In the past the BFI has had an informal agreement with the union over this practice, but if the budget, profitability and significance of the Production Board increase, this relation may well become problematic.

As already noted such a shift would tend to break down the division between film culture and the industry. The contradiction for the IFA is that this shift may occur at the expense of recuperating its members' present practices, reimposing the production relations that exist within the industry. It is a *constant* contradiction in that the third term/third practice is suppressed within the context of state 'arts' support within a capitalist mode of production. This argument tends to idealism, but it is certain that films produced by different practices/different funding bodies will continue to be situated in different and rigid contexts until such time as independent film-making practice can achieve a non-state-dependent position based on popular demand (a possible/the only possible third term?). Hence the importance of the notion of social practice which implies an intervention not only in film culture but also in the body politic where it may be possible to

build audiences. The crucial question for IFA members is whether it is possible to place a film in these different contexts, to intervene in different arenas, for this demands of film-makers the ability to speak different discourses, which accentuates the importance of the concept 'social practice', itself situated within a *theoretical discourse* while referring to other discourses, other practices.

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The notion of social practice is equally central to the two papers presented for the third workshop/plenary on the problems of distribution, exhibition and criticism. If it isn't already by now clear, the IFA in general faces enormous problems in these areas. Very few films receive regular and substantial screenings, and even then to limited audiences. The most 'successful' in this respect are probably those films which slot comfortably into existing networks — Co-op, women's movement, etc — but this by no means accounts for the majority of IFA members' films, some of which are consciously designed to be difficult, to refuse an automatic and easy placement, to make an intervention which by its nature produces a shift in categorisation and reading. Two analyses emerge, one of which emphasises the problems of distribution and exhibition as a mechanical problem of finance, cataloguing, and publicity, the other emphasising the lack of an already constituted audience, and the consequent necessity to explore and develop audiences as part of an oppositional social practice. Arguing from this second position, the papers accentuated the point that representation is necessarily a political question, and that a challenge to bourgeois film practice entails work on the social relations of consumption.

Since long before the IFA's formation in 1974, groups and individuals have been developing a more aggressive distribution/exhibition policy, taking films where they have previously had no place, holding discussions with audiences, thereby laying the groundwork for film practice outside of bourgeois film culture. Cinema Action, for example, have an almost ten-year track record in the trade-union movement not only in terms of distribution/exhibition, but also in terms of co-operative production; the London Women's Film Group has always assumed the necessity to challenge audiences' approach to film; the Co-op has consistently worked with avant-garde films. Indeed within the IFA there are a considerable number of different practices, whose very diversity presents problems for the development of a coherent strategy for the IFA as a whole. In recognising that a considerable amount of work on the institutional and ideological location of existing and potential audiences needs to be done, conference moved that a research project should be established to explore sites where productive interventions might be effected. Institutions such as SEFT, The Other Cinema, the BFI, Trades Unions, and Left organisations were singled out for attention, and it was constantly stressed that the IFA should retain its autonomy in any links that

- 116 might be established; particularly in relation to the BFI. Proposals were also passed that a catalogue of independent work should be constructed and that IFA regional groups should do work to publicise and organise screenings and institute a flow of films and information between the regions.

Finally, something should be said about the role of criticism and theory. There in fact exists considerable mutual suspicion and hostility between film-makers and theorists, which was expressed at the conference in different ways. Film-makers complain of their films being somehow fixed, emptied and rigidified by a critical discourse which has valid currency only in higher-educational spheres. As yet little energy has been directed into developing a discourse that would be useful to IFA film-makers in their work with audiences less sophisticated in their reading of filmic texts. Such a discourse must be developed if film-makers are to produce necessary work in conjunction with audiences on the politics of representation, both in relation to their own films and in relation to the ideology of industry product. Hence the earlier reference to the dual discourse that film-makers must be able to command if they are to engage with audiences and with the film theory that informs their practice. We are not saying that film-makers have not generated this discourse within their own practice, which they do every time they produce and exhibit a film, but what has been lacking is a generalisation of these experiences. Hence the position voiced in a paper on the subject of the IFA Newsletter that 'it is not the site for the establishment of an academic orthodoxy, but a place where all members feel that their polemics, views, and experiences are welcome and do not need to be couched in "theoretical" language, and especially film-makers, who are notoriously unwilling to express themselves on paper'. Film-makers have at times a real fear of theory, a fear that is produced by the tone of some theoretical writing, owing to the apparently prescriptive nature of its demands and opinions, which are often casually dismissive of considerable bodies of work.

What then is the position that theoretical work can occupy within the the IFA? The answer is perhaps twofold. First that it is necessary for the theory that informs some IFA members' practice to be constantly re-examined in a dynamic relation with that practice as it develops/so that it can develop, continuing to provide the context within which IFA films can make their intervention in film cultural institutions (a sphere that the IFA cannot afford to ignore). Second, that critics can work with film-makers to develop that discourse whose lack has already been noted. There is also the third possibility that film-makers should involve themselves in the production of theory, and film theorists should involve themselves in film-making practice. Some groups and individuals have certainly attempted to break down the division

of labour between 'thinkers' and 'doers' but this is not universal, nor likely to become so. However, one can't help feeling that a little bit of production experience might temper John Ellis's casual dismissal (*Screen* v 17 n 4, Winter 1976/77) of films produced from at least months, and in some instances years, of constant struggle. In general terms it is necessary for film-makers and theorists to transcend this latent, and occasionally overt hostility and to cooperate on projects that intervene constructively in the cinematic institution. Educational audiences can clearly be approached via SEFT, and both *Screen* and *Screen Education* have a role to play here, particularly if the project is to be followed up of introducing independent films into schools and developing exchanges of information between film-makers and teachers. Other audiences pose different problems, but there are activities that could be profitably pursued, such as liaison with the cultural initiatives of political groups - eg the recent 'Marxism and the Mass Media' series of events. Before opening its new cinema The Other Cinema also held a series of seminars devoted to areas where it intends to develop film practice. The particular role of critical workers might be one of liaison, initiating conferences and events around the differing needs and assumptions of various sectors within the body politic.

At the end of conference the IFA formally adopted its constitution, thereby ratifying the policy whose direction and impetus have been determined by the work that active members have effected during the last nine months. In general the papers presented at the conference, on the basis of that work, tended to concentrate on issues that principally affect 16 mm production, funded by State bodies, within the context of a theoretical discourse based on the notion of 'social practice'. Though they appear to have expressed mainly the concerns of the London-based film-makers, many regional film-makers with similar concerns attended the conference and secured considerable provision for the involvement of the regions in the IFA, being represented on the Executive, which is bound to hold regular regional meetings. In addition provision was made for the publication of the Newsletter in different regions, a policy that is crucial to maintaining a multidirectional flow of information, news, policy issues etc.

On the basis of the policies passed at conference the IFA will develop a particular constituency, rather than acting as an umbrella organisation for all film-makers. This should not be lamented since it is on the basis of its interventions within the cinematic institutions and relation with cultural workers struggling in other media that the IFA will develop and maintain its interests, securing in the process the constituency on which its strength is based.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Because of the diminishing availability of back issues of *Screen* (all numbers up to v 14 n 4, Winter 1973/74, are now out of stock) the Society for Education in Film and Television has authorised the Editorial Board of *Screen* to proceed with the publication of one or more **SCREEN READERS**, to contain a selection of the most significant articles published in the magazine over the past six years. We are pleased to announce that the publication of

SCREEN READER, n 1, CINEMA/IDEOLOGY/ POLITICS

will take place in the summer of 1977. It will contain material published in *Screen* in 1971-73, focussing on three major areas:

- 1 The debate in France between *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique*, including:
Cinema/Ideology/Criticism Jean-Luc Comolli
Direction and Jean Narboni
John Ford's 'Young Mister Lincoln' Gérard Leblanc
Cahiers du Cinéma
 - 2 The debate on realism developed in *Screen*, including:
Realisms in the Cinema Paul Willemen
Deep Focus Patrick Ogle
 - 3 Questions of progressive aesthetics as developed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, with original translations of material from *Lef* and *Novy Lef* and from the writings of Lev Kuleshev and Vladimir Mayakovsky, together with articles by Peter Wollen, Stanley Mitchell and Masha Enzensberger.

Also included are articles related to these debates by Ben Brewster, Christopher Williams, Nicholas Garnham and Peter Wollen, and Goffredo Fofi's *The Cinema of the Popular Front in France 1934-38*. Introduction by John Ellis.

Further details, including date of publication, will be available shortly.

All enquiries to:

**Screen Reader
SEFT
29 Old Compton Street
London W1V 5PL**

Dear *Screen*,

I should like to dissociate myself from John Ellis's article on the BFI Production Board (*Screen*, Winter 1976/7), which he did not discuss with me during its writing and which I did not see until it was being prepared for press. Not only is it patronising and, indeed, disparaging towards film-makers and their work, but it is full of misrepresentations and errors of judgement. I should like to single out three areas for comment.

1 Film groups. The article asserts that 'group projects often end in disarray', they cannot cope with 'intensive work' or find a way of 'sharing the burden'. These vague generalisations are damaging not only to the Film Work Group, which is quite gratuitously singled out, but also to all the other groups which are active - Berwick Street Collective, Cinema Action, Liberation Films, Newsreel, Women's Film Group, etc. The same paragraph perpetuates the philistine belief that the aesthetics of technicians are 'inevitably formed by the demands of the dominant industry for which they usually work'.

2 BFI Distribution. John Ellis's article gives an unqualified endorsement to the BFI's distribution policies for Production Board films, without attempting to place these in relationship either to the practices of independent distributors - Cinema Action, the Co-op, The Other Cinema etc - or to the debate among film-makers about alternative modes of distribution, exhibition and consumption ('reading'), some of it stemming from concepts and ideas elaborated in *Screen* itself. Instead he adopts a purely technicist approach.

3 *Riddles of the Sphinx*. Our film is not a 'deconstruction' film. It was never intended as such, nor did we describe it in that way in our application to the Production Board. This misrepresentation is only too typical of the thumbnail travesties the article offers as accounts of films and film work.

To film-makers John Ellis's article must appear as a PR job in defence of positions associated, on one front, with the present Head of Production at the BFI, Peter Sainsbury, who requires

- 120 support on a more serious, less politically naive basis and within the framework of a strategy which clearly recognises the ambiguities inherent in progressive state funding, something the article does not begin to provide, though it is of prime concern to the Independent Film-makers Association and its members.

Fraternally,

PETER·WOLLEN

Dear Editors,

In its last issue (v 17 n 4, Winter 1976-77) *Screen* published an article by John Ellis, a member of its editorial board, about the BFI Production Board. Although on the surface the author appears to favour independent film-making as opposed to 'commercial' cinema, the article is based solely on information received from full-time employees of the BFI. No independent film-makers were consulted for their opinions, and John Ellis seems to be totally ignorant of current debates on what should be the relationship between independent film-makers and the BFI. He does not relate in what way independent film-making has developed its various practices without the aid of the Production Board. Consequently he articulates how independent film-making can best be legislated for by a state organisation, and therefore how what has been a long-term struggle can be recuperated by a state organisation which, far from creating an 'alternative', can fall into the trap of creating an institutionalised marginalism.

By 'enumerating the various aesthetics which have been current in the Board's area of operation', all of which refer to films by members of the IFA, John Ellis (and *Screen* before him) produce discrete categories which mask their political presence. As a result he sees no unifying basis to 'independent cinema'; he feels the films can be lumped together under this rubric only because he allows himself to define them negatively - 'not "dominant ideology", not produced for profit'. It may be that the institutional target of these films differs; nevertheless whether it is for example a factory, an art gallery, the cinema, parliament or, if in super 8, the family, they will attempt to articulate the repressive functions of these institutions in a capitalist society. The artificial separation of the various practices by the use of these bromide-like reductions ignores (in a manner often characteristic of *Screen's* work) the political and economic conditions that produce independent cinema. John Ellis argues that if the categories could be agreed upon by the Board 'selection would be of relatively minor moment . . . as it could be done from a shortlist prepared by the [Production Department] staff in accordance with expressed policy'. He fails to recognise that these criteria will be formulated either by the BFI itself rather than the film-makers it claims to support, or by Production Board members appointed individually

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by the BFI. This strategy is potentially far more conservative than past attempts by Board members to avoid expressing their very concrete preferences behind a liberal stance of being open to anything. Furthermore the attempt at categorisation itself seeks to safely contain and stagnate a film-making practice whose essence is continually to question itself, develop and change.

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The creation of the job of Films Distribution Officer made it apparent that the Production Department had in mind a more far-reaching policy than just selection. The *Screen* article makes it crystal clear just what those policies are which they (the department) would like the Board to legitimise by agreeing to a selection policy:

'A . . . pluralist policy . . . implies a different mode of operation for the Board itself: not so much the selection of individual projects but rather a consistent (personal) involvement with areas of film-making so that the Board as a whole can work out . . . an overall conception of what is happening and what is being attempted. It would then be possible for some projects to be commissioned rather than received, in the sense that the Board would be involved in the stage of the elaboration of ideas and the evolution of groups before an official application was made. It also implies that the Board would be involved in the production and distribution/exhibition of the films it produces.'

He suggests that film-makers avoid consultation with the Production Department because they conceive of their projects in terms of 'personal ownership'. His solution appears to be to hand over ownership to the BFI instead, so that it not only controls distribution and exhibition, but also determines the projects themselves. We neither take nor seek a commission however plausibly served.

Coupled with this is the idea that:

'The Board is not a marginal institution within the industry. . . . It is rather a part of a still embryonic alternative circuit of specialised 16 mm distribution, and as the only large scale producer in that circuit has to play an active role in forming a public for its films.'

Not only is it utterly false to imply that it is only by the grace of the BFI that independent films are produced and exhibited, but the question is not gone into whether an alternative modelled on the capitalist industry, albeit state funded, is desirable or not; what are the contradictions of such a policy; and is there not a case for the BFI, like the Arts Council, backing films independently or collectively made, without having to own the means of their distribution and exhibition? And cannot the same principle apply to financing cinemas and distribution groups, who for years have struggled to create an independent film circuit? These questions

122 are not asked by John Ellis for the simple reason that he does not locate the Production Board's activities within the industry and therefore can easily slip into the demand for creating an alternative, leaving out any notion of the potential for creating a wide opposition to the film industry's practices. It is quite clear from the article that John Ellis (whether representing himself, *Screen* or the Production Board – and, contrary to what he says, the IFA representatives are now recognised as being on the Board in a representative capacity) has not considered the needs and demands of independent film-makers in their attempt to oppose commercial film and TV practices in Britain. His complaints about the amateurism of the Board could, with equal logic, lead to the conclusion that the distribution of BFI funds, although administered by full-time officers of the Production Department should be in the hands of those who *actually* produce 'films that the industry has refused or ignored'.

Last year it was generally assumed that the proposed Production Board policy referred to a selection policy for funding films. The idea was to produce criteria which would assure 'some fairness in the distribution of its funds' in that no one type of non-commercial film-making was given a disproportionate amount of money at the expense of others. We in the IFA are totally opposed to the type of categorisation that *Screen*/John Ellis appear to support and are deeply concerned about the implications of using such criteria in a selection policy, and of the other restrictive policies that may stem from it. We more than welcome the very real support that the Production Board has given independent film-making in the past, but feel that the implementation of such policies as those outlined in John Ellis's article will totally negate that support.

JANE CLARKE
(On behalf of the IFA London Region
and Executive Committee)

John Ellis writes:

In answering these letters I should first like to stress that the opinions expressed in the article were not those of the BFI or of Screen, even if such homogeneous 'opinions' could be formulated. I do not think it possible to attribute one homogeneous position to such institutions or groups: the attempt to do so by all the sides in the debate about the Board has acted to obscure several important issues about its operation. My article was intended to help clarify this situation to some extent. However it fell into some of the problems current in the debate and, in addition, produced

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The first fault was to publish a polemical article in a quarterly magazine. The article was related, as was stated at the beginning, to the debate around the season at the NFT and the controversy it uncovered. The article therefore relates itself to the situation at the end of October 1976 or thereabouts, dominated by the question of policy (whether it exists or not, whether it is desirable or not), but it appeared at the end of January 1977 in a rather different situation – a situation in which a large number of new personnel were being appointed to the Board, including myself (unfortunately after the article had gone to press).

The second fault is the form of address adopted. The article was addressed, naively, to the then members of the Board themselves. It was intended to demonstrate the policy inherent in their liberalism, and intended to suggest a policy which would ensure some fairness and relevance in the distribution of the available funds. The article was therefore written emphasising the specifically filmic, formal characteristics of independent cinema, using what I considered to be a liberal tone. The tone was, however, sufficiently non-liberal to annoy several of the individuals to whom it was addressed. Yet there were more serious aspects to this miscalculation of address. The conception of direct address took no account of the actual readership of the article, for whom a different form of analysis is more appropriate (that which speaks, as the IFA letter suggests, of the relation between the Production Board and the State, and the possible strategies that could be adopted to it). The form of address left the article unable to speak of anything except the relation between the Production Board and independent cinema conceived of as an ensemble of formal practices. Analysis of the overall situation was ruled out.

Thirdly the article suffered from some rather sloppy and hurried writing which was exaggerated rather than improved by sub-editing. This is particularly noticeable in the formulation about collective film-making and about technicians on page 12. It is symptomatic of the hurry in which the article was produced resulting from starting from scratch to write a history for polemical purposes. The consequences are various inaccuracies and an overall imposition of more homogeneity on the six tumultuous years of development than they perhaps deserved. For instance it is stated on page 11 that 'no consistent attempt was made to solicit projects from groups or individuals', whereas Mamoun Hassan did go out to find several of the feature films associated with his time as Head of Production. This practice lapsed since his departure.

The fourth problem with the article is the categorisation or classification of films. It should be said at once that the article makes these too rigid and mutually exclusive, and, most important,

124 there is no real indication that they are intended not as classifications which exist in perpetuity, but as hypotheses which indicated related but distinctive areas of work. They are meant to be revised continuously under pressure from the proposals made to the Board and the personnel's own experience of cinema. It was never intended that they should be formulated for the Board by the BFI Governors (who are incapable of such an effort) or by anyone else, but should be part of a continuous debate that takes place within the Board about the overall nature of its constituency. Such a debate could take into account the continuous development, self-criticism and reflection of independent cinema. However it is a major fault of the article that it does not help this development: it could have done so if it had devoted more space to a discussion of the varied forms of film-making in their complexity, rather than offering characterisations which, however provisional, are taken by readers to be some kind of legislative position.

It is clear from these criticisms that I do not subscribe to many of the statements of the IFA letter. I would like now to outline what these differences are, as they should help to promote a further discussion about the Production Board.

First, the question of diversity versus unity in independent cinema is more complex than the letter suggests. Although 'certain political and economic conditions' may produce the space for independent cinema they do not produce 'independent cinema'. Strategies of film-making are adopted which answer and attempt to change these conditions, and it is these strategies which predominate in the constitution of independent cinema. These strategies are ideological: they have to do with processes of signification and representation, they turn upon the multiple displacements of subject-position that are present in any film. This dominance of the ideological creates a diversity which is exactly the basis of 'the film-making practice whose essence is continually to question itself, develop and change' quite rightly defended in the letter. To state a diversity on the ideological level (although this level may be the major determinant in the institution as a whole) is in no way to posit a conflict of interests: the very interchangeability of ideas, the impossibility of fixing categories except as working hypotheses, amply demonstrates this. Nor is it to deny that certain economic and political interests are held in common, and will continue to be held in common. But I think that it is dangerous to propose a unification on the ideological level as is implied in stating that all the films 'attempt to articulate the repressive functions of these institutions in a capitalist society'. This statement necessarily relies upon an ideology of socialism (institutions are functional/they repress/their repression gains its character from capitalism) whose character elides the diversity of political positions which the films take up: this is as dangerous as categorising their individual practices of signification under un-

I also disagree fundamentally with the analysis of the relation between the Production Board and the State which is implied in the letter. The argument identifies the Board and the BFI with the State in an uncomplicated way. It can then produce the equation *Board policy = BFI policy = State control = recuperation of the long term struggle of independent film-making = institutionalised marginalism*. However, I would argue (now that it becomes possible) that the progressive distance from the central apparatus of political representation endows each stage with a different value that makes the equation untenable. The BFI exists, like any other State institution, to include (which is not meant in the pejorative sense of 'contain' or 'recuperate') the competing ideologies which make up the space of its practice. It does not express a monolithic line, a single specific ideology or political position: it can only attempt to reproduce existing representations. Thus the BFI can be seen as the institutionalised form of the ideological crisis which runs through the practice of cinema: an ideological crisis which, in differing ways, has produced both Screen and the IFA, and, in addition, means a lack of clear direction for narrative film-makers within the orthodox industry. (For an analysis of a similar situation in France, see *Le Cinéma, Culture ou Profit*, reviewed in *Screen* v 17 n 3, pp 122-7). To disregard the fact of this crisis and the way it has produced a wide diversity of positions within the BFI is in various ways to disregard 'what has been a long-term struggle'.

However, the Production Board itself exists at one more remove from the business of the Institute itself. This is demonstrated in its real independence, regarding itself as not answerable to any other body for its decisions (not even to independent cinema). In the Juvenile Liaison affair, this has meant first that it angrily refused the BFI Governors' attempt to withdraw the film 'to keep the peace'; and, second, that another state institution (the police) has had to resort to the due processes of the law to counter the Board's decision. Hardly a homogeneity of state interests. The specific nature of the Board as institution is as much defined by the fact that it deals specifically with experimental film-making. This has the effect of turning it from being a lackey of the State to a body which is peculiarly open to oppositional/independent/alternative forms; it takes them *a priori* as its brief. It does not have to include all competing definitions of the cinema as the BFI as a whole has to do. Its specific area is non-commercial film-making; and will remain so for the foreseeable future. What this means remains to be determined by the various forces and ideologies at play. My suggestion was to negotiate the institutional demands (those of fairness, something to show for the money) in a way which provides a continued financing to projects which

- 126 cover the range of independent cinema. I do not see that equating this peculiar and open institution with the State (whose hostility seems to be guaranteed in the letter's analysis) really helps this aim.

Finally, I think that the letter is a little unfair to my article at some points. I do not suggest that 'it is only by the grace of the BFI that independent films are produced and exhibited'; I merely suggest that a capital fund of £120,000 renewed annually can be deployed in ways that will promote a healthy (and not State controlled) growth in an area that is chronically starved of finance. Similarly, the letter separates (and thus makes a nonsense of) the two points I was proposing as one: that the pluralist selection policy should be adopted by a Board composed of people actively involved in independent cinema. The IFA letter reifies my suggestion for a pluralist policy (however dogmatic its statement of categories was) by separating it from the suggestion that those undertaking the selection should be actively involved in this rich area of film-making, and thus makes more nonsense of the article than it deserved.

These statements are my own: they are not those of Screen nor of any recognisable position within BFI controversies. They are based on the belief that it is impossible to be puritanical in politics. For people deeply enmeshed in capitalist social relations it is impossible to be 'independent' of these relations. Positions are rather based on constant political reassessment of the conjuncture.

Review

Terry Eagleton on Ideology and Criticism

A number of articles, a small book (*Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Methuen, £1.00) and a bigger book (*Criticism and Ideology*, New Left Books, £4.95, incorporating material also published in *NLR*) have recently established Terry Eagleton as the major exponent of a new form of literary-ideological criticism, provoking awed responses in the establishment press. How novel this form of criticism is depends on the perspective one takes on it. In terms of general Marxism, of film theory and of literary theory in France, Italy, Germany or even the United States, it is perhaps not all that daringly original. Its most advanced reference points are Pierre Macherey's *Pour une Théorie de la production littéraire* (1966), against which it marks, if anything, a retreat, and Fredric Jameson's eclectic *Marxism and Form* (1971). Many of its concerns

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are avowedly traditional. Although not actively philistine towards modernism, it is angled towards the more compact discursive, narrative and poetic forms of the English and European 17th-19th centuries, and it does not act particularly to open out these forms in the manner of Todorov or Genette, let alone Barthes. Within the period, moreover, Eagleton's concern seems mainly with 'high art' – ie the ideologically dominant bourgeois forms.

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In the context, however, of this tight little island and that most conservative of disciplines, 'Eng lit', its originality is considerable, both relative to academic orthodoxies (including the Leavisite) and to left heterodoxy. Marxist criticism in Britain has generally been sparse and has tended, when it has not been blithely economic-reductionist, to lapse into a spiritualistic conception of art (in the guise of 'socialist humanism') not very different from that of the Forsters and Leavises. By situating literature and literary studies within theoretical Marxism, and in particular within a theory of ideology, Eagleton succeeds in circumventing the worst dangers both of economism and of its spiritualist double. Basing himself on a broadly Althusserian concept of ideology, he argues that ideological forms cannot be reduced to their economic base, but that at the same time they do not have any mystic qualities of 'human essence' about them – that they are, in short, determinate and yet variable forms. Artistic and literary forms in particular are seen to have both a relativity (they change) and a relative autonomy (they do not change in direct correspondence with changes in the economic base) and a genuine effectivity of their own within ideology and within the social formation. If there is to develop a Marxist literary-critical practice in Britain this position marks a necessary beginning.

It is however only a beginning. It is one thing to liberate artistic and literary forms and practices from economism and spiritualism and another to relocate them in a suitable historical and theoretical perspective. *Criticism and Ideology* is largely devoted to an attempt to relocate literature within the space provided by the concepts of mode of production and ideology on the one hand and author and text on the other. The attempt fails – in my opinion because of the uneven theorisation of the concepts being brought into play. Ideology and mode of production are mobilised as theoretical abstractions, but author and text are treated as first-level concrete givens. The author is simply seen as a historical person and never at all as an effect of the text, and as for the text, well sometimes it seems to mean book but there is one embarrassing moment when 'text' and 'production' are counterposed (as script and *mise en scène* might be in film parlance) without any acknowledgement, or apparently awareness, that there has been a theoretical slippage certainly in the concept of production and probably in that of text as well. The result is an instant soldering of empirical data onto a more elaborate and abstract conceptual

An equally serious slippage, this time within the area of theory, occurs in the transition between Chapter 2, entitled 'Categories for a Materialist Criticism', and Chapter 3, 'Towards a Science of the Text'. In Chapter 2, five categories have been invoked, two of them general and three more specific. The general categories are mode of production and ideology, each defined in broadly Althusserian terms; the specific categories adduced to aid in the analysis of literature are 'literary mode of production' and 'aesthetic' and 'authorial' ideologies. The concept of 'literary mode of production' (abbreviated to LMP) appears to have been coined in response to Benjamin's observation in 'The Author as Producer' about the need to talk about the position of the author not *towards* the relations of production but *within* them. The area it covers is a real one, and much in need of investigation, but as conceptual coinage it is inept, since the relations it designates do not constitute a mode of production or even a part of one, though they may well intersect with it. Not surprisingly, the concept does not reappear in any later chapter, and this is no great loss. What is more disturbing, however, is the way in which production in general disappears as the book proceeds. First production is transmuted into *mise en scène* and then the place that had previously been assigned to the mode of production vis à vis ideology is taken over by 'history'. The problem here can either be seen as one of historicism (history as the motor of history) or of the lack of it (only 'history' is historical, ideology is apparently not history). Either way the result is incoherence and the posing of a lot of pseudo-problems about Jane Austen and the 'real'. Actually the remarks as they directly concern Austen's characters and their 'knowledge' are extremely enlightening, but they could as well if not better have been made in the context of a discussion of textual productivity rather than in that of a misleading essentialism of the real.

For all these criticisms, *Criticism and Ideology* remains an important book, not always easy to read but on the whole at its best when it is most readable (since its turgidites of style seem to arise in direct proportion to its conceptual confusions). *Marxism and Literary Criticism* is altogether slighter. For the most part it expounds the arguments of others, rather than propounding an argument of its own. At the same time it does have a position, whose weaknesses and strengths are much the same as those of the longer book. It has one major historiographical weakness, which is that it fails to come to terms adequately with the Stalin period and tends to fall back on uncritical acceptance of what can be roughly designated as a Trotskyite version of events (the distortion theory). But, with that proviso, it stands as the best existing introduction to the overall field.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH.